
**AFRICANIZING REBEL INSURGENCY IN A POST-COLONIAL STATE AND
RAMIFICATIONS FOR AFRICAN REGIONAL INTEGRATION: INSIGHT(S) FROM THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)**

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Abstract; This article aims to ponder the effects of political instability and, rebel insurgency, in particular, have on Africa's regional integration frameworks by drawing insights from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The upsurge of militias has been a norm in some African countries such as the Central African Republic, Somalia and Sudan. This article utilized a qualitative method. When one adopts this type of method, s/he anticipates gathering a robust viewpoint pertaining to human behaviour and the rationale behind it. Data retrieved was drawn from secondary sources such as books, chapters in books, journal articles, credible online sources and policy briefs that monitor African conflict (especially the DRC). Similarly, the political instability that continues to take centre stage in the DRC because of many and diverse rebel groups fighting for the country's prestigious resources has produced a web of both internal and external instability, further crippling the country's economy, neighbouring countries and Africa's regional integration blueprints.

Keywords: Africa, Conflict, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Regional Integration, Rebels

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to understand the severe ramifications continuous conflict driven by rebel groups has on Africa's growth agenda with an emphasis on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Scholarly research on African states and conflict, in particular, is extensive, literature presents a plethora of historical interpretations, current analyses, alternative proposals, and varying recommendations (see Mlambo, Mpanza and Mlambo, 2019). It is on the premise of this that this article draws from an Afrocentric perspective and DRC in precisely on the destabilization caused by conflict while drawing a nuanced appraisal on the effects this has on Africa's quest for regional integration and much needed economic growth.

Varin (2017) is of the view that despite decades since the end of colonial rule, Africa has continued to be referred to as the Dark Continent largely driven by the fact that the continent continues to be associated with on-going violence and human rights violations stimulated by non-state actors and dictatorship rule. The extensiveness of civil wars,

rebellions, coup d'etat, child soldiers, terrorism and war crimes has attracted numerous (both Afrocentric and Eurocentric) scholarly attention in the last few decades intending to understand the politics of this violence. For decades and particularly since gaining independence from their respective colonizers, most African states have continued to be embroiled in extensive political conflicts, which has at times affected regional neighbouring states. This has been in most cases (albeit not entirely) stemmed from political disagreements and the quest to control much-needed resources.

This has also given rise to militia groups who have for many years severely disrupted the political dispensation of some countries. Adetoba et al (2014) submit that these conflicts are driven by poor economic order, weakened states and in some cases the fragmentation and proliferation of splinter groups based on ethnic and religious ideologies. The significance of state collapse in contemporary International Relations (IR) could be addressed to the struggle by states for dominance, hegemony, relevance and survival. A state can be viewed as what Adetoba et al (2014) call a body politic or society of men united for stimulating their mutual safety and advantage by their combined strength. Indeed, a state interacts and forestalls the actualization of its existence within four constituent elements (1) population (2) territory (3) government and (4) sovereignty. A skim reading of literature draws no relevant nexus on rebels and regional integration predominantly from an Afrocentric standpoint and the DRC in particular.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From Colonialism to Democracy and a Need for African Unity towards Regional Integration: A Succinct Analysis of Literature

While it is not the intention of this article to draw a nuanced historical overview of colonialism in Africa, however, for more than five decades, colonialism on the continent has been subject to immense scholarly debate(s). While the history of interaction between the African population and those from outside the continent is old, for the majority of Africans, colonial domination by European powers was both a relatively recent event and short phenomenon (Zahorik and Piknerova, 2017). When one talks of colonialism in Africa, this is a phenomenon that transpired between 1800 to the 1960s and came about because of the changes in the mode of production in Europe (the emergence of the industrial revolution) which steered in a new process of production. According to Bellucci (2010), African colonialism, whether formalized or not, was a tactic employed by European countries to transfer revenue from domestic societies to owners of industrial enterprises in the metropolis. It was driven by laws and juridical procedures that were forcefully imposed on the African population and were mainly driven in three mechanisms.

1. Forced cultivation: Obliging the African population to nurture crops determined by metropolis for export.

2. Forced labour: Forcing the population to work on infrastructure projects (ports, roads and so forth) normally for very low wages.
3. Payment of taxes: Forcing the population to pay taxes in the currency of the colonizer.

In essence, the African population was tied down to a system of manipulation that hampered them from improving their living conditions. Colonial powers had shaped the map of Africa like no other historical event. New borders were formed and many states in terms of size, population, resources and ethnic composition came into being. It is in this vein that Ocheni and Kwankwo (2012) aver that colonialism in Africa had severe consequences regarding the underdevelopment of African territories in diverse and many ways. It distorted African patterns of economic development such as the production of goods, markets, trade, transport, provision of social amenities and patterns of urbanization.

Importantly, and as in most Africa countries, colonial rule introduced ethnic discrimination, exclusion and militarism. Post the 1960s, a period where most African states began to be freed from the European hegemony, the notion of democracy and regional integration were viewed as fundamental in most policy-makers and African heads of states. Schultz (2019) asserts that the concept of democracy is very old and dates back to Plato and the ancient Greeks who regarded it as a rule by the masses. Bystrom (2016) joins several scholars to argue that in the modern era, democracy is often labelled in a form of popular government where the popular rules, either directly or indirectly, through the representations based upon the principle of majority rule. However, more than five decades after the end of colonialism, democracy in some corners of the continent is still a conundrum. African states still rate very poorly when it comes to respecting human rights, corruption and election integrity. As witnessed in other regions, the process of democratization in Africa has been turbulent. Cilliers (2016) draws attention to the fact that election-related violence has often led to political instability in many African countries such as the DRC, Lesotho and Zimbabwe to mention a few. Such is drawn from the fact that elections (and predominantly from an Afrocentric perspective) do not necessarily translate to democracy. Thus, regular, free and fair elections do not translate to individual freedoms, female empowerment, political equality an independent civil society, a free press all of which are essential mechanisms of liberal democracy.

The continent is home to some of the longest-serving heads of states in the world who have often signalled their intent to overstay their duration in power. Such tendencies undeniably undermine good governance and transparency in a continent that requires massive transformation to spearhead economic growth. So one may ask, what about the continent's regional integration prospects. Pan Africanism, the struggle for independence is where we may unearth Africa's quest for regional integration. Continental states realized that they were lacking in their political, economic and social structures, thus,

regional integration was observed as a worthwhile objective for their revival and development. In Soko's (2007) assessment, historically, regional integration has constituted a fundamental part of development policies in Africa driven by the need to overcome the continent's structural problems encompassing of political fragmentation, minor intra-regional markets and low per capita incomes.

Mutharika (1972), believes that regional integration as a terminology means to bring portions of an item into a complete whole. From an economic perspective, it outlines the organization of economic undertaking within a state with the notion of fostering the development and growth of a country or region. The 1960s, an era of post-independence in Africa called for integration partly due to the enormity of socio-economic and political challenges none of which newly independent states could address on their own (see Owusu, 2015). Moreover, regional integration was been viewed as a necessity for building African unity, consolidating regional political structures and producing regional blocs for enhanced use in international political forums and negotiations with the counties globally.

Mutunga (2017) points out that we may trace regional integration in Africa to the United Nations (UN's) authorized Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) whose mission is to enhance economic and social development of member states. However, an obstacle here was most African states have small populations, minor domestic markets, poor economic resources management, weak population structures, widespread conflict and are confronted with political instability. Despite these pitfalls, I am of the argument that African states have embraced regional integration as a means of participating in the global arena. In Africa, there is a long history of regional integration initiatives; however, the 1960s to the 1980s witnessed an escalation of the continent's regional integration process such that there is no country in Africa that does not belong to at least one regional grouping. Thus, over the last four decades, the institutional framework for Africa's integration process has gone through several phases in reply to changing realities. The formation of the African Union (AU) in the early 2000s constitutes the latest phase in the development of regional cooperation and integration in Africa. As Adetula (2014) recalls, over the last five decades, the continent has experimented with over 200 regional inter-governmental organizations, a large percentage of them claiming to promote regional integration (Mlambo, 2020). Similarly, regional integration and in the developing world in, particular, should at least fulfil eight essential roles (van Langenhove and de Lombaerde, 2007).

1. Stimulating trade
2. Forming an environment that is conducive for private sector investments
3. Enhancing infrastructural programmes to support economic growth and regional integration
4. Execution of robust public sector institutions and good governance.

5. The development of a comprehensive civil society
6. Stimulating peace and security in the region
7. The building of environment programmes at the regional level and
8. Strengthening of regions collaboration with other regions globally.

Drawing from Adetula's aforesaid arguments, one might argue that while these are critical drivers for development, achieving some in Africa has been a daunting task for policymakers, heads of states and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Some states limit both the work and voices of civil society, fail to attract much-needed investments, do not adhere to good governance protocols and are prone by security threats. Achieving desired Afrocentric regional blueprints cannot take place in this regard. The importance of regional integration is drawn from the fact that it assists in stimulating necessary economic growth such as telecommunications, water resources, information and communication technology (ICT) and transport networks that many African states with low levels of development and limited resources are unable to construct on their own (Mlambo, 2017). It is worth noting that while regional integration offers various and many benefits for member states, such are not always guaranteed as they also depend on the degree and extent of commitments from involved member states. Drawing from this argument, I infer that the core fundamentals of regional integration arrangements are to bring regional and/or bordering states into what I call a coalition and create an association or community where they work jointly in trying to realize a set of objectives such as economic growth blueprints and partnerships in diverse areas that ought to enhance their growth projections.

METHOD

Brynard, Hanekom and Brynard (2015) point out that research methodology has to do with the planning, organizing and execution of research to obey the demands of truth, objectivity and validity. In knowledge production, there are some fundamental theoretical and rational expectations that establish efficient research in a particular study. From a wider standpoint, research methods have to do with how data is retrieved for any discipline. However, when one undertakes research, no methodology that is considered sacrosanct especially in the domain of social sciences. Drawing from the above, there are two main methods one can employ, either qualitative or quantitative. The former relates to the research describing kinds of characteristics of people or events while the latter focuses on measurements and amounts. However, in between the two is the mixed method that combines the two. In essence, having a research methodology is vital in any research as it grants the reader an understanding as to how data was retrieved (Thomas, 2003).

This article utilized a qualitative method. When one adopts this type of method, s/he anticipates gathering a robust viewpoint pertaining to human behaviour and the

rationale behind it. Data retrieved was drawn from secondary sources such as books, chapters in books, journal articles, credible online sources and policy briefs that monitor African conflict (especially the DRC). The dependence on secondary sources enabled the researcher to have a vigorous and wider explanation on the topic under investigation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Continental Conflict: A United Africa Deterred

Post the colonial era, persistent insecurity in Africa and some of the ineffectiveness of peacebuilding mediations to prevent conflicts necessitate that we revisit approaches to managing constant conflict in Africa. According to Khadiagala (2018), Africa and her fifty-four states possess actors who have long sought to surmount the deficiencies of weak states by building collective norms and institutions for security, prosperity and unity. Mlambo (2020) maintains that in the early 1960s, after the emergence of the OAU, coupled with the transition of some African states from colonialism to independence, the continent has continued to be prone to an array of political instability.

In a similar vein, Ibeanu (2015) contends that the demise of the cold war and the transitions from military and authoritarian rule to the civil-democratic government in many African states in the 1980s and 90s gave impetus that the continuous instability dilemma was finally ending. In most states around the continent, transition procedures were established, elections took place and new governments came into power. Nevertheless, over the last three decades, there seems to be a throwback to political instability, this may attest the underlying hypothesis that liberal democracy would provide a vigorous framework for resolving African conflicts has not materialized. Bello-Schunemann and Moyer (2018) advocate the view that from an Afrocentric perspective and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in particular faces multiple structural pressures that upsurge the risk of instability and intense conflict in the region.

While the magnitude of this varies from region to region, some states like the mineral-rich DRC and others are driven by religious beliefs such as Boko Haram in Nigeria have caused havoc to innocent civilians (see Mpe, Shai and Ogunnubi, 2020). Mateos (2010) identifies some common aspects that may be drawn into the analysis of conflict in Africa. Firstly, they often take place internally (within internationally recognized borders). Secondly, that is localized (often such conflict does not affect the whole country) and thirdly, conflict is driven by actors who have different ideas and are often grouped in what he views as three components:

1. Primary actors: These are directly engaged in conflict and made up of governments, armed groups or guerrilla, militias, paramilitary forces, warlords,

organized crime gangs, police forces, mercenaries, violent fundamentalist groups, regional armed groups, regional troops and so forth.

2. Secondary actors: These are made up of those who although not directly participating in the conflict of confrontation thereof, but are often interested in its continuation. They comprise of criminal networks, regional governments, businessman, local and regional traders, international governments, private security companies, businesses with interests in natural resources, arms industries etc.
3. Tertiary actors: Is made up of those who try to intervene with or without the mandate to do so with the aim of managing the situation. This encompasses of the diaspora, civil society organizations, local and international mass media, regional and international governments, regional and international organizations, diplomatic organizations, international humanitarian organizations and multilateral organizations such as the UN.

As I contend, in the DRC, all of the above actors are at play predominantly the primary and secondary actors. This stems from the fact that rebel infected regions in the DRC have become business premises where the money is made, resources are controlled and sold, criminal networks are at play and there are profits to be made. In essence, state failure has continued to be the driving force of many conflicts in Africa. Accordingly, the continent provides many examples of ineffective, dysfunctional or non-existent states that are unable to function thus bringing with it security threats to their population and neighbouring countries. This brings with it the notion of not being able to deliver democracy and endorsing economic development.

Incessant Instability in the DRC: Identifying the Driving Motives

The DRC, the most populous Francophone country in the world is located in the centre of the continent and shares boundaries with Congo (Brazzaville), the CAR on the West, Sudan on the North, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania on the East and Angola and Zambia in the South. Joseph (2016) holds the position that anyone who follows Africa's political landscape post the colonial era would attest that the DRC is one state that over the past five decades witnessed an array of internal instability. Some authors (see Hedlund, 2020; Salehyan, 2009; Eichstaedt, 2011 and Autesserre, 2010) have pointed to the fact that this has been driven by the many rebel groups, the need for natural resources and tribalism among other driving factors. One must bring to the fore that for more than five decades that Belgium ruled the DRC, the Congolese population were treated harshly, exploited and neglected. Hence, when independence came, the Congolese (like many other African states) were poorly prepared for it as they lacked needed infrastructure on which to build an independent state. It came as no surprise that the post-colonial political

elites proved incapable of managing a newly independent state and which eventually brought with it anarchy, political, military, ethnic and racial tensions.

Prunier (2010) notes that, since the mid-1990s, there has been considerable instability in the Great Lakes Region (GLR) partly driven by the fundamental shift in the domestic politics of core states and the weakening of Western engagements in the region. The unresolved post-colonial issues of nation and state-building, weak regional institutions for integration, resources, environmental vulnerability and problem-solving (Monyae, 2014) also prompted this. Lalbahadur (2017) stipulates that we may draw the historical context of the DRC to its neighbouring countries. The involvement of Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda in the previous Congo wars as a consequence of shared histories and populations, porous borders, access to minerals and further highlighted by the Rwandan and Ugandan government support for insurgents. Because of its rich resources, diverse rebel groups have been formed in the DRC particularly in the Eastern part of the country which has made the country ungovernable. Hendricks (2015) notes that within a week of independence from Belgium, the province of Katanga threatened to secede plunging the country into civil war. Power struggles begin between Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and President Joseph Kasa-Vubu that ultimately led to the assassination of Lumumba in 1961.

According to Melvern (2020), what further triggered much instability in the DRC was the Rwandan genocide in 1994 which brought with it profound impact on the stability of the country. Many Rwandese of Hutu origin fled to the Eastern parts of the DRC and many joined armed rebels such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) who in turn supported other rebel groups such as the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD-Goma) and the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC). Hence, what started in Rwanda had a spillover effect and came to the DRC. This made the Eastern part of the country to be infested with rebels both local and foreign. In the DRC, different militia groups and armies are keen to exercise their authority and power over the main mining sites, where the money is to be made and where territories are controlled by different warlords. In this vein, those who control particular mines make every effort to retain their position and those wanting to seize it utilize military force to do so.

This brings a win-win situation further fueling violence because of the need to control specific territories. It also makes arms to be in high demand and the money made in controlling and selling these precious resources has enabled groups in the Eastern DRC to obtain heavy weaponry such as cannons, long-range mortars, AK-47s, ammunition and so forth. However, Westing (1986) is of the view that whether natural resources carry the potential for conflict depends on the extent of the following. (1) The military and industries rely on the natural resources in the short and medium terms (2) the natural resources crosses political and ideological divides during its supply and routing and (3) there is contestation for the territory in which the resources are found. Drawing from

Westing's arguments, I am of the view that (especially in the Eastern parts of the DRC) resources do fuel conflict as it has, since independence, become a source of revenue and survival for many and driven by ethnic rivalries.

The on-going conflict situation in the DRC presents a tragedy with many twists and turns that is undoubtedly testing the resolve of both continental and international actors. Even when it seems there is light at the end of the tunnel, the problem soon resurrects and these events affect both the GLR and the Southern African Development Community¹ (SADC). This instability had severely contributed to the inability of former president Joseph Kabila's government to function properly and stamp its authority. To Jacquemot (2010), there have been successive peace accords and UN resolutions in the DRC to improve the security and humanitarian assistance mainly to:

1. Decrease the cases of abuse and violence
2. Limit the number of displaced persons
3. Increase in the access of humanitarian aid and human right services for vulnerable individuals
4. Protection of women and children and
5. Reducing impunity and bringing to justice those responsible for violence and human rights violations.

Apart from the above points, peace is still an elusive thing in the DRC driven by the degree of mistrust to an extent that whichever leader emerges, whether through the gun or falsified ballot, often faces the same challenge (Namangale, 2015). Solving the instability of the DRC is not a simple matter as previous interventions have demonstrated. While over the years there are many treaties (see table 1) that have been signed with the notion of halting instability in the DRC and which have brought relative peace, the situation continues to remain volatile.

Table 1: Some of the Peace Agreement in the DRC since 1999.

Agreement	Place	Involved Parties
Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement	Lusaka, Zambia, 10 July 1999	Angola, the DRC, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe and the MLC
Sun City Agreement	Sun City, South Africa, 19 April 2002	The DRC, MLC, Civil Society, unarmed political opposition groups
Pretoria Accord	Pretoria, South Africa, 30 July 2002	Government of the DRC and Rwanda
Luanda Agreement,	Luanda, Angola, 6 September 2002	Government of the DRC, the RCD, MLC, Political

		Opposition, Civil Society, RCD-Movement for Liberation, RCD-National, the Mai Mai
The Final Act	Sun City, 2 April 2003	The DRC Government and over twenty armed groups.
Peace Agreement between the Government, the CNDP and other armed groups.	Goma, the DRC, 23 January 2008	The DRC Government, and over twenty armed groups
Peace, Security and Cooperation for the DRC and the Region.	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 24 February 2013	Angola, Burundi, CAR, Republic of Congo, the DRC, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia.

Source: Muraya and Ahere (2014).

To draw a nuanced appraisal and understand the nature of the conflict, one should understand its aspects and in the DRC these include but not limited to (1) state bureaucracy (2) national boundaries which are a legacy of colonialism (3) marginalization and disenfranchisement of communities (4) ethnic consciousness and identities and (5) corruption.

The Multiple Facets of the Constant DRC Conflict: Rebels and Domestic Instability

As alluded earlier, after more than six decades since gaining its independence, armed rebels have become a central feature of political settlements in the DRC. Over the years, these groups have gained substantial influence on the power and practice of the political, military and economic elites who are seen as the core actors in these settlements. Thus, they have become a pivotal figure in the DRC's political landscape and have gone to exercise substantial influence on the governance practices of local authorities such as administrators, members of the security services and state-recognized customary chiefs. Even when such rebels disappear because of being forced out of specific locations, they are often succeeded by others (see Verweijen, 2017).

One may draw conflict dynamics in the DRC from a multilayered approach and rebel formation is spearheaded by such variegated factors as inter and intra community conflicts around political, economic and military influence, power disputes, the general nature of the state, governance and the political economy of the DRC and regional power politics (Baaz and Verweijen, 2013). In the past few years, most of the instability in the DRC has been driven by non-state actors predominantly the Forces Democratiques de Liberation du Rwanda (FDLR) and the now-defunct March 23 Movement (M23). Other prominent ones include the Alliance des Patriotes pour un Congo Libre et Souverain

(APCLS), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Mai Mai and the Lord Resistance Army. Neethling (2014) submits that scholars and particularly post the 9/11 period have vested ample time in locating the general nexus between terrorist networks, militias and rebel groups and what has been unearthed here is that these have been very active in so-called failed states. A large focus of scholarly literature has focused on the international dimensions of terrorism together with its manifestations.

Nevertheless, he argues that sub-regional terror has been a prominent feature in post-colonial Africa. This is drawn from larger amorphous groups that attract a lot of individuals at a local level within a religious context like Somalia's Al Shabab or Nigeria's Boko Haram to rebels who (see Table 2) terrorize civilians like the many armed groups in the DRC.

Table 2: Number of Events targeting Civilians by country 2011-2021 (DRC).

Year	Causalities targeting civilians
2011	356
2012	393
2013	296
2014	381
2015	267
2016	286
2017	313
2018	771
2019	975
2020	1261
2021 ²	14

Source: Armed conflict location and event data project (2021).

The above figures point a blurred picture that in ten years (2011-2021), there have always been innocent civilians killed in a war that not only they gain nothing from, but have nothing to do with. In the DRC, rebels act as terrorist organizations who frequently employ the use of terror in their action and insurgencies like executing individuals and raping women and young girls. What makes the attacks of these rebels complex is that most of them are directed at individuals that are not directly linked to the rebel's real target.

Thus, instead of focusing on a government or ideology, they focus on the intimidation of a particular community just to get the attention of the government. It is in this vein that Vlassenroot (2008) is of the view that during what he calls the Congo Wars (1996-2003),

the country was challenged by a new type of actors encompassing of armed groups, rebel movements, ethnic militias, economic and military entrepreneurs. Some but not all were there just to claim a monopoly of violence (as still the case today) and own shares in the distribution of resources. On the other hand, some were of the plan to forge local and trans-border alliances to increase their local control and to consolidate political and social power.

As discussed in a previous article titled *Armed Soldiers and the Increasing Use of Child Soldiers in the Central African Republic, DRC and South Sudan: Implications for Regional Security*, most of these rebels especially those affiliated with the Mayi-Mayi fighters are young and often children. Even if these young children have joined these rebels voluntarily, what must be understood is that the choice to enrol is often taken in the context of very limited opportunities for them. Mkandawire (2002) submits that in Africa, three types of post-colonial rebel movements have conquered the armed conflict scene. First is the secessionist/regionalist movements or those seeking superior autonomy for a specific (often ethnically specific) area. Second, are those that have become rural-based following defeat in urban confrontations and thirdly are externally supported movements returning from exile and passing through the countryside on their way to the urban areas.

One may assume that in countries of high natural resource dependence as the DRC, the greed theory comes to the fore, here, and abundance of natural resources intensifies the threat of severe conflict as a phenomenon also known as the resource curse. These resources present what Laudati (2013) calls a prize of territorial control thereby inspiring both motive and opportunity for greed-driven conflict for rebels. From an African context, this theory has been used extensively to highlight the role resources play in driving conflict.

Repercussions for African regional integration

In any country globally, intrastate and interstate conflict can bring with it dire consequences. From a regional perspective, it can halt regional activities such as trade, the flow of resources, human capital development, the destruction of physical assets and spearheading an array of spillover effects. Such leads to slow economic growth for any country particularly the less developed as the case in Africa. The spillover effects can severely affect neighbouring countries and from a DRC viewpoint, this may be SADC member countries and those of the GLR. Similarly, spillovers at times include refugees, small arms and weapons, increase in crime, terrorist activities, illegal arms trade, money laundering and piracy among other things. This is eminent in Africa because countries share cultural, political and historical backgrounds. The one of refugees is still very much critical, especially in SSA. Conflicts in states such as Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda,

Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Lesotho has produced a web of refugees in most Africa states particularly those deemed to be peaceful (Mutunga, 2017).

In the emergence of conflict, resources meant to bolster service delivery and infrastructural development are diverted to defence activities. In better-developed countries such as South Africa houses many refugees, this can also lead to violence such as xenophobia where the local populace will be of the notion that refugees are here to take their jobs (see Mlambo, 2019). Inspired by the impaired economic situation and lower investments in state fiscal capacity, one may expect a state in conflict and turmoil not to be able to respect its commitments towards the countries in its RECs. As it has shown in the DRC, conflict-prone nations limit their chances of accruing Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and may find it a challenge to import and export goods. Indeed, conflict in the continent has had a massive effect on the continent's fight against poverty, ultimately dampening Africa's prospects for long-term structural stability and sustainable development while also causing the death of thousands of civilians not directly involved in such conflicts.

In the DRC, identifying any long-term solutions to the current problems looks very bleak. From a focus point of view, the DRC's policy outline should be incorporated into a long-term blueprint that possesses an inclusive and clearly defined sustainable objective that should be based on in-depth and accurate analysis of long-term economic and political interests (Stevens, Hoebeke and Vlassenroot, 2008). The need for both financial and natural resources would be pivotal in this regard especially resources from the DRC itself as these are the ones who know the situation better than external interventions. While over the years in the DRC conflicts have been resolved through reconciliation efforts and conflict resolution mechanisms, armed rebels may destabilize these initiatives and reignite conflict dynamics. They may still undermine the implementation of agreed settlements. Undeniably, with so many peace accords that have been agreed to in the DRC over the years, these have often been undermined in the end.

To enhance peace, maintain collective security and advance progress in Africa and SSA in particular, what should be brought forwards are mechanisms of formulating and applying reforms with the intent of making political governance socially relevant. Some of these may include the following:

1. The consolidation of real peace, physical and social security of people
2. Implementation of robust social, political and legal institutions which can sustain peace, economic growth and development
3. The promotion and protection of gender equality, civil and human rights
4. The formation of integrated and coherent regional programmes and priorities
5. The circulation of natural resources justifiably and
6. Protecting the environment

Drawing from the above, regional integration will not be feasible unless national policies and politics effectively work and produce the results that can alleviate poverty. While good governance is always on the lips of African heads of states, African states have to promote and protect the principles and values of good governance. Ideally, leaders of RECs should also invest in robust institution building and capacity development, as without a good institutional framework and capacity, these cannot accomplish their role effectively and consistently regarding conflict management. The roots of the conflict are already known in the DRC; hence, steps of identifying these should already be in place.

Additionally, to avert conditions that entice violence conflict, capable societies must be created and these must be driven by three components of security, well-being and justice for all citizens. I argue that all continental and international actors involved in minimizing the DRC conflict need to do away with short-term methodologies. All actors should be aware that it has been decades since DRC has been conflict-prone and short-term solutions are and have been not applicable. The DRC situation requires long-term resolutions consisting of robust transformation policies, peacebuilding mechanisms, governance structures, collective bargaining power between other states and RECs.

This is particularly true for the Eastern part of the country as if the DRC can be rebel free, I cannot see why transformation reforms cannot be successful in the near future. Alexander et al (2003) make a very useful point when they attest that policymakers have to realize that effective conflict prevention cannot be viewed only in terms of internal law and order or military measures. Robust analyses are also pivotal and indeed needed to draw a nuanced appraisal on the conflicts root causes and dynamics that may be numerous and complex. As the dynamics of conflict gain prominence, the role of states both as a source of conflict and as a primary agent of its prevention and resolution has become more blurry. In contemporary African politics, more non-state actors have risen to a vital role predominantly where states are weak or seem dysfunctional. This is notwithstanding that in some African states civil society is not welcomed, are threatened, jailed or even killed(Alexander et al. 2003).

The role of civil society particularly in politically stable democratic and press free states like South Africa have done magnificently in terms of being the middleman, holding government into account and promoting democracy (Mlambo, Zubane and Mlambo, 2019). While I argue this might be more challenging in a country like the DRC, civil society from states such as Botswana and South Africa can play a very active role in the instability in the DRC. The situation in the DRC must not just be observed from a humanitarian point of view. Holistically, it must be viewed as a failed transformation from colonialism to independence and it is time for African solutions to fix African problems using their mechanism and methodologies.

Bringing in Continental Powers: What Role for the African Union?

In Africa, no other continental organization has the peace matrix high on its agenda like the AU. Since its transformation from the OAU to the AU, the organization was born out of a more stringent need for African peace and security. The need to establish the AU was taken at an extraordinary OAU summit in Sirte, Libya in September 1999 and was finalized at a summit meeting of African leaders in Durban, South Africa on July 2002. Some of the core elements of the organization were to focus on the promotion of peace, security and stability through its Peace and Security Council (PSC) and promoting integration (Moolakkattu, 2010).

The functions of the PSC include the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa, anticipation and prevention of conflicts, promotion and implementation of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction activities. Kahombo (2018) notes that the establishment of the PSC was a result of the reform of the OAU security system which proved to be weak and inefficient. Likewise, just like regional integration, no single African state can address the plethora of conflicts, proliferation of child soldiers, refugee flow, human trafficking, terrorism, drug trade, money laundering, illicit arms and underdevelopment in isolation. Minor and particularly failed states possess limited national diplomatic capacity and would find it a challenge operating by themselves and for their voices to be heard. Even global institutions such as the UN have increasingly recognized the role of regional organizations in spearheading tasks such as preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Organizations such as the AU are not only closer to African conflict, but in most cases can better anticipate them and enjoy more validity than international actors while possessing knowledge on specific states. Nevertheless, I argue that one may presume that irrespective of some noticeable gaps in the AU in terms of anticipating conflict as in the case in Mozambique (Delgado province driven by the extremist group Ahlu Sannah Wa-Jama), where innocent civilians are being killed. The organization remains a vital continental role player where other continental mechanism are lacking or need improvement. Some of the setbacks encountered by the AU include being restricted by its principles of national sovereignty (non-interference) and subsidiarity. As an important organization, if it is to overcome these problems, African states should agree to limit some of their restrictions (see Woldemichael, 2021).

A noteworthy protocol that can be adopted by the AU moving forward can be to push all African states (whether politically stable or not) to pursue peace, consolidate democracy and abide by constitutionalism as it cannot always count on external actors such as the United States of America (USA), UN, European Union (EU) for assistance. The on-going conflict in not only the DRC but also Somalia, South Sudan, Libya and CAR will remain the agenda of the AU's PSC together with the emergence of terror in Mozambique. Interestingly, the DRC will chair the AU in 2021 and must contend with not only its issues

but also those of the continent. Whether President Felix Tshisekedi will be able to consolidate his power in the DRC and externally successfully remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION

The article aimed to ponder the effect of African conflict on regional integration by drawing insights from the DRC. The article rightfully shows that instability has dire consequences for not only development and economic growth of the DRC but importantly the continent at large. The DRC like any other continental country is severely hindered by internal conflict a phenomenon that is closely linked to the failure to implement constant development and to consolidate accountability and effective governance that has created a web of armed organizations.

Continuous conflict in Africa and especially the DRC clearly outlines that the continent is failing to grapple with this catastrophe. A clear blueprint project encompassing but not limited to cooperation, resource allocation, robust monitoring and evaluation, ensuring that civil society is brought in to develop effective solutions can be a starting point of departure. This is notwithstanding that, some of these protocols are there, however, they are just lacking a clear direction with limited tangible results.

I also argue that porous borders, weak security and maintenance of them is another contributing factor and this is relevant to the DRC and its neighbours. These heighten the risk of cross border movements of rebels both internally and externally and further contribute to the trafficking of weapons. Thus, the need to focus more resources on border security. It is therefore imperative that we robustly analyze the dynamics of the situation in the DRC as by doing so policymakers and heads of states will be better able to come up with initiatives that may be effective in not only diminishing conflicts but also dealing with the issues that drive them. For regional integration to be successful and especially attainable in Africa, limiting country-specific and continental conflict is of utmost importance in the 21st century. In this regard, for Africa to achieve her set of regional integration objectives, addressing national, political and socio-economic challenges is a prerequisite. This will require (and often easier said than done) responsibility, accountability, good governance and competent state-society relations.

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