

## **AFRICAN UNION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA: THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FUTURE INTERVENTIONS**

**Dr. Silk Ugwu Ogbu**

School of Media and Communication,

Pan-Atlantic University, KM 52 Lekki-Epe Expressway, Ibeju Lekki, Lagos. Nigeria.

---

**ABSTRACT:** *As a continent with all kinds of existing and emerging conflicts, Africa needs to invest hugely in conflict prevention, resolution and management in order to move towards the desired goal of integration, political stability and economic growth. Without peace and stability, it is impossible for development to occur. Since the end of colonial rule, the retrogression of many African countries has been traced to conflicts and the failure of extant resolution mechanisms to address the root causes of discontent, injustice and socio-political exclusion. The fact that conflicts now assume transnational and international dimensions has elevated the need for greater collaboration and cooperation among countries in conflict management, especially through the platforms provided by international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU). The African Union has been particularly instrumental not only in the identification, resolution and management of intrastate and cross-national conflicts in Africa, but also in the provision of a framework for multilayer co-operation, partnership and integration between governments and multinational actors across the continent. This paper is an attempt to evaluate the performance of the AU in the management of conflicts across the continent. To this end, the interventions of the AU in the conflicts in Burundi and Sudan were used as case studies. Specifically, this paper is of the opinion that indigenous conflict management techniques built upon traditional communication systems should be incorporated in a new approach to conflict management, if the African Union is desirous of impacting meaningfully on regional peace and security.*

**KEYWORDS:** Communication, Conflict Management, International Organizations

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Africa is a continent wrapped up in conflicts. From the Great Lakes region to the south and from the tropics in the west through the central region to the Horn of Africa, there is no region that is not contending with conflicts, most of them violent and protracted. The majority of these conflicts are intrastate while some are transnational, international or a mixture of some sort but almost all of them exhibit profiles of states that are weak or failing. Violent conflicts in Africa have left a trail of devastation and gratuitous destruction, decimation and impoverishment of the civilian population, environmental degradation, institutional decay, political instability and socio-economic stagnation. The root causes of these conflicts can be traced to such factors as extreme poverty of the majority of the population; marginalization of the young people; unequal sharing of resources; social and economic disparities; denial of freedom of expression; and lack of participation and democratic structures (UNESCO, 1998).

As a successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African Union (AU) was launched in Durban, South Africa, in 2002, and may be described as a relatively young

organization. However, the challenges facing the organization are quite old and deep-rooted. In fact, it was the failure of the OAU to effectively manage these old challenges, especially the proliferation of violent conflicts throughout the continent that gave birth to the formation of a new organization that could act decisively to halt the downslide. The principle of “non-interference” in the domestic affairs of member states, as it were, emasculated the OAU and rendered the organization impotent in the face of abominable atrocities, genocides and other forms of human rights abuses in Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda and other parts of the continent. Furthermore, the realization that intrastate conflicts have transnational and international ramifications, in terms of the surge of refugees across borders and in the general disruption of social and economic activities across the affected regions may have convinced the African Heads of States on the necessity of a new organization that would be empowered to deal with the dynamics and emerging challenges of violent conflicts across the continent.

Although, the African Union was formed under difficult circumstances, it was faced with great expectations from a continent in need of swift solutions. Unlike the OAU before it, the new organization was given the mandate to intervene in any conflict, anywhere in the continent, irrespective of its nature or location, as long as such conflict has the potential to destabilize the political and socio-economic balance of the continent or the capacity to destroy precious civilian lives. However, the impression must not be made that the AU was formed just for the purpose of resolving or managing conflicts alone. From a broader perspective, the AU was created to facilitate the achievement of other great objectives. These objectives include the following:

- I. To achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and the people of Africa;
- II. To defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Member States;
- III. To accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent;
- IV. To promote and defend African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its peoples;
- V. To encourage international cooperation, taking due account of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- VI. To promote peace, security, and stability on the continent;
- VII. To promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance;
- VIII. To promote and protect human and peoples' rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and other relevant human rights instruments;
- IX. To establish the necessary conditions which enable the continent to play its rightful role in the global economy and in international negotiations;
- X. To promote sustainable development at the economic, social and cultural levels as well as the integration of African economies;
- XI. To promote co-operation in all fields of human activity to raise the living standards of African peoples;
- XII. To coordinate and harmonize the policies between the existing and future Regional Economic Communities for the gradual attainment of the objectives of the Union;
- XIII. To advance the development of the continent by promoting research in all fields, in particular in science and technology;
- XIV. To work with relevant international partners in the eradication of preventable diseases and the promotion of good health on the continent.

In pursuant of the stated objectives above, the AU constituted various specialized organs. Some of these include:

- Pan African Parliament (PAP): This is the legislative body made up of 265 elected representatives from all 54 member states of the AU;
- Assembly of the African Union(AAU): This is the Supreme governing body of the AU, made up of heads of states and heads of governments of AU states;
- African Union Authority(AUA): This is the Secretariat of the AU responsible for the administration and coordination of AU's activities;
- African Court of Justice (ACJ): This is the court created to deal with general legal matters and disputes, including issues of human rights and treaties;
- Executive Council (EC): This council is composed of the foreign ministers of member states. It decides on regular matters such as foreign trade, agriculture, communication etc, but is accountable to the Assembly;
- Permanent Representative Committee (PRC): This is made up of nominated representatives of member states. They prepare the work for the Executive Council;
- Peace and Security Council (PSC): This council is responsible for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. It is made up of 15 members elected on a regional basis by the Assembly;
- Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ESCC): This is an advisory organ composed of professional and civic representatives.

Of these organs, this paper is particularly interested in the PSC, especially in the extent to which it has performed its core mandate of conflict prevention, management and resolution as well as peace keeping, peace enforcement and peace building in the continent. Although designed to act like the Security Council of the United Nations (UN), the PSC has no permanent members. Members of the council are elected on a regional basis to serve for a limited time (maximum 3 years) only. The implication of this is that no member is able to exercise overbearing influence or veto over the decisions of the council. Consequently, the continental "Big Boys" like Nigeria and South Africa who are not allowed to flex their muscle in the council have tended to retreat to their Regional Economic Communities (RECs) where they have more influence, which indirectly affects the efficacy of the council, especially in regard to its effectiveness in managing conflicts in the regions.

Nevertheless, the AU through the PSC has made remarkable contributions to conflict management in Africa. So far we have seen the AU intervene decisively in the resolution of conflicts in Burundi, Comoros, Sudan and Somalia. The AU has also been instrumental to the peace process in Liberia, Sierra Leon, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mozambique, Libya, Ivory Coast etc. Naturally, it is imperative to evaluate the performance of the AU in these interventions so that improvements can be made where necessary. To that extent, this paper is an attempt to examine the important role the AU is playing in the management of conflicts in Africa and the ways that its extant capacity can be enhanced. The paper identifies communication as the proverbial double edged sword that can be the source as well as the solution to every conflict and advocates for its effective utilization as a proactive and cost-effective approach to conflict management in Africa.

**AU and Conflict Management in Africa**

The 1990s was a particularly turbulent and challenging time for Africa. Throughout the continent, violent conflicts dramatically and simultaneously erupted almost all over the place. In Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, DRC, Somalia, Sierra-Leon, Angola etc, civil strife and sporadic fighting threatened the political survival of the states and the stability of the regions. Unfortunately, the OAU was unable to act because its Charter provided for the respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states. This means that the organization could intervene in a conflict situation within the territory of a member state only if it was invited by the parties involved. Regrettably, most of the conflicts were intrastate and so the OAU was effectively restrained because its principle of non-intervention viewed such disputes as internal matters and the exclusive preserve of the governments concerned (Murithi, 2008).

However, after the carnage in Rwanda, it became obvious to many that the principle of non-interference had become archaic and counter-productive and must have to be scrapped if the OAU was going to make any meaningful headway in resolving the numerous conflicts threatening to destroy the continent. The concern about the prevalence of armed conflicts in Africa, it seems, and the fact that no single internal factor has contributed more to socio-economic decline on the continent and the suffering of the civilian population more than the scourge of conflicts within and between (African) states, eventually persuaded African Heads of States to jettison the obsolete principle of non-intervention.

Therefore, it was not surprising that the AU, from inception dismissed the principle of non-interference and embraced the “covenant of non-indifference” (Peen Rodt, 2011). This means that while the AU respects the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its members, it assumes a self-imposed responsibility to intervene in the internal affairs of its member states, “in circumstances where war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity are perpetuated” (Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2002: 4-h). In addition, the AU through subsequent amendments to its Constitutive Act, also provided for itself the right to intervene within the territory of member states in cases of “a serious threat to the legitimate order to restore peace and stability to the member state of the Union upon the recommendation of the Peace and Security Council” (Protocol on the Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2003: 4-h).

Thus the African Union became the first intergovernmental organization in the world to arrogate to itself, not only the right to intervene in the internal affairs of its members but also the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) the civilian population of its member states from any form of genocide or human rights abuse associated with civil strife, like in the cases of Rwanda and Sudan (Peen Rodt, 2011). Back in 1992, Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Boutros-Ghali, 1992), the first African Secretary-General to the United Nations had envisioned the birth of an intergovernmental organization in Africa whose impact on conflict management would cover four major areas:

- Preventive Diplomacy
- Peacemaking
- Peacekeeping
- Post-Conflict Peace-building

Interestingly, ten years later, it would seem that the PSC (the conflict management organ of the AU) totally assimilated and even expounded the views of the Secretary General. Through its mandate, the PSC created several innovative agencies that were designed to achieve almost the same goals advocated by Boutros-Ghali above. Some of these agencies include: The Continental Early Warning System (CEWS); The Panel of the Wise (POW); The African Standby Force (ASF); The Military Staff Committee (MSC) and the Peace Fund (PF) (Travares, 2010).

The CEWS was designed to provide information early on ‘troubled spots’ and potential conflicts so that they can be prevented or resolved in time before they escalate to violent insurrections. The POW constitutes of five experienced and respectable members drawn from each of the regions for the purpose of advising the council on the best approach to mediation in any conflict detected through the CEWS or otherwise. The ASF provides for the establishment of a standby military force made up of regional brigades ready for rapid deployment on peacekeeping missions decided upon by the PSC or interventions authorized by the Assembly (Makinda and Okumu, 2008). The MSC was set up to advise the PSC in all matters relating to security and deployment of military force while the PF was established to provide funding for operational activities, especially peacekeeping (Peen Rodt, 2011).

In spite of the fact that these agencies are still in their formative stages, the AU has been able to intervene decisively in the resolution or management of a lot of conflicts in the continent so far. However, for the purpose of evaluating the performance of the AU in this regard, this paper will focus on just two notable AU interventions: The African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB) and the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS).

### **The African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB)**

The African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB), 2003-2004, was the very first effort made by the AU to intervene in the management of a conflict within the borders of a member state as provided by its Constitutive Act. In Burundi, several decades of rivalry and mistrust between the Tutsis in minority (15%), who had firm control of the government from independence and the Hutus in majority (85%), had given way to frequent outbreak of hostilities and civil disorder towards the late 1980s. This worsened when the introduction of a multi-party system in 1992 heralded the emergence of the first democratically elected Hutu President, Ndadaye Melchior and a parliament dominated by the Hutu Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU).

The refusal to relinquish power to the Hutus by the Tutsis who also had control of the military ignited ethnic hostilities which unfortunately degenerated into a very bloody civil war that claimed an estimated 300,000 civilian lives. The initial continental efforts to restore peace in Burundi began with the mediation attempts of former Tanzanian President, Julius Nyerere in 1996. Nyerere was able to bring the Hutu FRODEBU and the Tutsi UPRONA to a negotiating table in Arusha but was unable to broker any agreement between them. When he died in 1999, former South African President, Nelson Mandela, took over as the chief mediator in the conflict. With his experience and enormous goodwill at the time, Mandela was able to finally persuade the warring parties to sign the fragile ‘Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi’ in August, 2000.

In its determination to preserve the truce and cessation of hostilities achieved through the Arusha Accord, the AU in February of 2003 resolved to deploy a peacekeeping force in



Burundi known as the African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB), made up of 3,335 soldiers and monitors for an initial period of one year (April 2003 – May 2004). AMIB was primarily mandated to supervise, observe, monitor and verify the implementation of the Arusha Agreement, the ceasefire protocols and the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme in the country.

In fact, AMIBs four main objectives were: to supervise the implementation of the ceasefire agreements; to support disarmament and demobilization initiatives and advise on the reintegration of combatants; to create favorable conditions for the presence of a UN peacekeeping mission; and to contribute to the political and economic stability in Burundi (Peen Rodt, 2011). The extent to which AMIB was successful in the achievement of these objectives at the end of its mission may still be debatable, but many have described the mission as one of AU's biggest success stories so far (Boshoff, Very and Rautenbach, 2010). Nevertheless, it is important to note that at the time of AMIB's deployment in 2003, the UN was reluctant to deploy its troops in Burundi because of the relative instability of the country at the time. The fact that AMIB was able to sufficiently stabilize the country in one year to enable the UN troops move in testifies to the hard work, determination and resilience of the mission in Burundi.

However, while AMIB was very successful in the monitoring of the ceasefire and the protection of the returning civilians and politicians, it faced serious challenges in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme, mainly because of funding and logistical constraints. Ethiopia and Mozambique, for example, who were supposed to contribute troops to the mission, had difficulties deploying because of funds, while international donors were also reluctant to contribute to the mission because of concerns over the dubious reputation of AU's predecessor plus unfamiliarity and uncertainty with regard to the integrity of the AU, just established only a year earlier.

In spite of the generous contributions made by South Africa to the mission in terms of logistics and extra funding, AMIB had insufficient capacity to maintain its operational forces and could not take on the additional burden of the 20,000 troops that were supposed to have been disarmed through the DDR programme. Nonetheless, it may still be safe to describe AMIB as a success, mainly because it was able to meet its major objectives in Burundi within its mandate without any roll over or extension of time. As Peen Rodt (2011) contends, the AMIB story is an illustration of how "a relatively small AU mission can make a significant contribution to both military and political management of a violent conflict, even when the UN is unable or willing to do so". Though the UN eventually took over from AMIB and established the UN Peace Operation in Burundi (ONUB), the AU, the UN and all concerned and interested parties will still need to continue working together to ensure that peace prevails and is sustained in Burundi (Murithi, 2008).

### **The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS)**

The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), unlike in Burundi, was undertaken under very strenuous and challenging circumstances. The conflict in Sudan was deep, complex and protracted, with root causes extending as far back as the 17th century, when Arab incursions led to the establishment of a sultanate amongst the indigenous Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa people of western Sudan. Several years later, a history of co-existence among the pastoralists and the agrarian societies in the region was put under pressure by drought, social and economic

marginalization and an attempt to “Arabize” or Islamize the entire country by the Government of Sudan (GoS).

The imposition of an Islamic constitution throughout the country by the GoS on 5th June, 1983 provoked a strong resistance from the South, who were led by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLNM/A) to fight for self determination in a brutal civil war grounded in sophisticated military insurgency that proved very difficult to suppress over so many years of protracted battle. In the West, the deliberate campaign of “Arabization” of the region started in 1994 by the GoS through the successful immobilization of the Fur opposition and the unleashing of Arab militants against the Masalit population also achieved very unpleasant and disastrous results. Between July 2001 and February 2002, the Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit activists began to forge an alliance of non-Arabs in Dafur to oppose the “Arabization” campaign (Allen, 2010). The effort gave birth to a formidable armed insurrection that began to challenge the legitimacy of the GoS control over the region and also fuelled indigenous demands for self-determination. By July of 2003, the GoS, overwhelmed and incapable of containing the insurgency, unleashed the Dafuri Arab Militia, popularly known as the “Janjaweed” to suppress the rebellious natives and tactically enhanced their operations through the provision of communications equipment, artillery, aviation and air support as well as small arms and advisors (Ekengard, 2008).

Unfortunately, by late 2003, the Janjaweed directed their campaign away from directly engaging rebel forces to attacking villages of the ethnic groups that formed the support base for the rebel movements. These attacks which eventually degenerated to bombings, looting, raping, killings and burning of the villages left a conservative estimate of 30,000 civilians dead, over 1 million persons internally displaced and over 20,000 refugees in camps across the border in Chad (Allen, 2010).

It was under these circumstances that the AU, propelled by its constituent commitment to “intervene in a member state pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity”, decided to intervene in the conflict in order to end the bloodshed in Dafur. In 2004, the AU’s military intervention in Dafur, under the auspices of AMIS, started with a contingent of 300 soldiers dispatched mainly to oversee the implementation of the “Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement” signed in N’jamena on 8th April 2004 (Jibril, 2010). By the end of 2004, AU had upgraded its military presence in Dafur into a full-scale military force of about 3,320 troops with a mandate to:

- Observe the ceasefire arrangements and eventually protect civilians;
- Mediate a negotiated political settlement of the armed conflict;
- Protect humanitarian operations and deter armed groups from attacking civilians (Jibril, 2010).

Although AMIS was later expanded to incorporate 7,000 troops, it was unable to achieve much success in line with the objectives stated above because of certain reasons. In the first place, AMIS suffered from poor funding. The insistence by prominent member states in the AMIS campaign that the conflict in Dafur was an “African problem in need of an African solution” provided an excuse for western donors to shift the financial burden of the project to the AU. Unfortunately, the AU could not raise the funds required for the operation and most member

states who contributed soldiers to the mission were also unable to meet the financial cost of maintaining their troops on ground. As a result, AMIS ran into logistics and operational difficulties. With little or no communication and transportation equipment, depreciating supply of food and basic necessities and a weak and disoriented command structure, AMIS was incapable of protecting itself, the civilians and the humanitarian operations in Dafur.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the effectiveness of AMIS in resolving the conflict in Dafur was undermined by credibility and legitimacy concerns. For some reasons, the mission was perceived by the rebels to be biased towards the GoS. As a member of the PSC from 2004-2006, the GoS was involved in articulating and approving the mandate given to AMIS which, the rebels insist was carefully manipulated to protect the interest of the government in the conflict. Some have argued that by allowing Sudan, a concerned party in the conflict, to play a leadership role in negotiating the terms of deployment and to exercise veto powers on any amendments of AMIS deployment agreement, the AU effectively sentenced its mission in Dafur to premature failure (Jibril, 2010). Unfortunately, the implication of this gaffe was that the neutrality and integrity of AMIS in mediating in the conflict quickly became doubtful and it was not long before it completely lost the confidence of the rebels it was meant to control.

It was not surprising, therefore, that some factions within the insurgency started seeing AMIS as a part of the enemy forces and began making demands for its withdrawal as a precondition for peace negotiations. This negative perception of the AU forces deteriorated to the extent that they became targets of planned and concerted attacks by rebel groups resulting in severe casualties for the AU mission in Dafur. Speaking to Reuters at the time, Mohammed Saleh, the leader of one of the rebel factions, Justice and Equity Movement (JEM), clearly accused AMIS of bias when he said:

“We want AU to leave and we warned them not to travel to our areas. We don’t care what is happening to the AU, they are part of the conflict now” (Tavares, 2010).

Finally, AMIS experienced severe funding challenges and lack of support from international donor agencies. The lack of consensus on a way forward in Dafur by the African leaders insisting on “African Solutions to African Problems” did nothing to create a positive image for a mission in dire need of moral and material support. Moreover, the public backing and state protection given to the President of Sudan, Mohammed Al Bashir, by some member states involved in the AMIS campaign, in spite of his indictment by the “World Court” over war crimes, infuriated many western countries and probably affected their interest and disposition to contribute to the mission. Eventually, the task of managing the conflict in Dafur was taken over by a joint United Nations and AU force, the United Nations African Mission in Dafur (UNAMID) with a capacity of 20,000 troops in December of 2007. By this time, the AU mission, it would seem, had practically lost its integrity and direction in Dafur and was in search of initiatives. Although the collaboration through UNAMID represents a radical and interesting new approach to peacekeeping in the continent, especially between these international organizations, and is still in its testing stages, there is no doubt that it provided AMIS with needed reprieve and a better framework for achieving its objectives in Sudan.



## COMMUNICATION AS A CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TOOL IN AFRICA

Conflict resolution or management is an extremely complex and delicate task especially when conflicts have already escalated to violent struggles. So far we have examined the efforts of the AU to resolve the conflicts in Burundi and Sudan. In Burundi, AU's intervention was quite successful but in Sudan, the result was not so good. The decision to review AMIB and AMIS in this context was mainly to highlight the nature of African conflicts and the capacity of the AU to manage or resolve them. From what we have seen, it is obvious that the AU is trying but is still far from meeting the expectations of the Africans it has assumed the "responsibility to protect" (R2P). Unfortunately, many expect the AU to wave a magic wand that will make African problems disappear and some compare the organization, which is barely a decade old, with the UN. However, the truth is that despite its heritage from the OAU, the AU still does not have the experience, logistics, operational capacity and funding opportunities available to the UN and may never do. Yet both organizations are expected to deal with identical challenges but with uneven resources.

In Burundi and Sudan, The AU missions suffered similar setbacks, especially the lack of adequate funding. The inability of the AU to finance its peacekeeping operations and the failure of the international donor agencies to redeem their pledges to AU operations often combine to frustrate these missions. AMIB succeeded not because it had sufficient funding provisions but mainly because South Africa was so committed to the mission that it covered all the major gaps. In general, peacekeeping operations are very expensive ventures that most member states of the union can simply not afford. The one year mission in Burundi ended with a price tag of \$134 million, while the budget for AMIS in 2005 alone was over 450 million dollars (Peen Rodt, 2011). The inability of the AU to raise the funds required for its peacekeeping operations by itself implies that it must depend on the contributions of foreign countries and donor agencies to meet the financial obligations of its missions. That is where the fundamental problem lies! The success of the AU missions, as it were, is not as dependent on its efforts as it is on the willingness of the rich western nations to finance them.

Since AU cannot afford to finance peacekeeping operations, it is only natural and wise that it should explore other ways of resolving regional conflicts even before peacekeeping may be required. In this regard, the use of communication as a conflict management strategy appears to be the most attractive and cost-effective option. Certain inbuilt mechanisms and organs of the Union like the CEWS, PAP, ACJ and the Assembly already provide the organization with a framework for achieving peaceful resolution of conflicts through preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and the use of effective communication systems. What may be required is for the capacity of these institutions to be strengthened or expanded to meet present and future challenges.

One way African conflicts can be resolved using communication is through the revival of traditional methods of conflict management which mostly depend on effective communication strategies. In fact, Bob-Manuel (2000) contends that most peacekeeping operations in Africa conducted under the auspices of the United Nations in the last few years failed mainly because of the use of western methods of conflict resolution. According to her, the resounding failures of the UN missions in Somalia, Rwanda and Angola is mostly because the political, military and sociological realities of these countries were not fully appreciated and comprehended. She

believes that there is a need for a new range of flexible and adaptable instruments that can take the more subjective, complex and deep-rooted needs and interests that underpin African conflicts into account, and that it is only when potential and actual conflicts in Africa are understood in their social context that they can be solved. In other words, values and beliefs, fears and suspicion, interests and needs, attitudes and actions, relationships and networks must be taken into consideration before a shared understanding of the origins and root causes of African conflicts can be developed (Bob-Manuel, 2000).

In reality, every conflict is essentially local and presupposes the existence of a social relationship. Unlike western methods of conflict resolution which are punitive and adversarial, traditional African methods are integrative and reconciliatory, designed to reunite disputants and restore relationships. In a way, traditional methods of conflict resolution were effective mostly because they relied upon simple communication tools like proverbs, songs, idioms, drums, gongs, masquerades, puppets, dances etc. By using these entertaining, relational and believable communication systems, African were able to manage and resolve their conflicts in a timely and cost-effective manner through the involvement of family heads, elders, age grades, women groups, oracles and so on.

In fact, there is no conflict that communication is not required to solve. Conflicts most times escalate to violence only when communication between disputant fail or has broken down. What is vital is that Africa should not abandon its traditional ways of resolving conflicts through familiar and trusted communication channels. Since conflicts usually emanate from interaction within a social context, depending on foreign methods alone to manage local conflicts may sometimes seem like using a square peg to fill a round hole. The recent Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria, for example, may be easier and cheaper to resolve if proper and trusted communication channels can be established with the sect rather than the use of military force which has so far resulted only in the loss of thousands of innocent civilian lives. Likewise, the conflicts in Somalia, DRC, and Mali may be easier to resolve if the AU would focus more on using communication and traditional conflict resolution methods more proactively. It does not make sense to allow conflicts to escalate to the point where peacekeeping will be required when it is obvious that the AU does not have the resource and capability to undertake such missions. "African Solutions to African problems" should mean using African methods to resolve African conflicts. That means that conflicting parties must be engaged to communicate the "African way" and should continue to talk with each other until an understanding or compromise is reached and relationships are repaired and restored. Another way communication can help the AU in the management of conflicts in Africa is by enhancing the capacities of the existing conflict management organs of the organization that leverage communication tools to achieve their objectives. For example, the CEWS can be empowered to provide comprehensive data on "trouble spots" and potential conflicts early enough so that the organization can move in on time to resolve them before they actually escalate to violence. A quarter of the money spent on peacekeeping missions yearly by the AU could go a long way in making the CEWS more reliable and efficient. Likewise, the mandate of the ACJ can be broadened to deal with a lot more of the issues that lead to violent conflicts in Africa. There is no doubt that if the court becomes very effective and proficient in the dispensation of justice, parties in dispute within the continent that are unable to get fair hearing in their states will become more interested in taking their grievances to the court as an alternative to taking up arms, provided that the impartiality and integrity of the court is not in doubt. Most times, people resort to violence only when peaceful means of conflict resolution

fail or are no longer available. As they say, it's only when peaceful changes are made impossible that violent changes become inevitable. In 2002, the border dispute between Nigeria and Cameroun which ordinarily could have led to a war, loss of lives and disruption of regional trade was successfully resolved through the intervention of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). This paper believes that with additional support and funding (perhaps less than what would have been spent on a peacekeeping mission in a year if a war had erupted between Nigeria and Cameroun), the ACJ can be elevated and equipped to perform just like the ICJ, if not better. There is no sense in taking conflicts from Africa to The Hague when the ACJ can equally adjudicate on these cases and may interpret the social and cultural contexts surrounding the disputes even better.

Again, it may be helpful to expand and further develop the capability of the AU to mediate more preemptively and professionally in conflict situations. Once conflicts have already erupted, timely and effectual mediation can easily make the difference between a full scale war and total cessation of hostilities. In this respect, the creation of the Panel of the Wise (POW) by the AU to enhance and facilitate mediations is innovative and commendable but so much more may still need to be done to consolidate the initiative. In October 2009, a seminar entitled "Towards Enhancing the Capacity of the African Union Mediation" was organized in Addis Ababa by the AU to articulate views on how this important communication tool can be more effectively deployed. At the seminar, participants and discussants made very interesting contributions on how AU can improve its mediation capabilities as a more cost-effective way of resolving conflicts in Africa. Some observed that the lack of trained human capacity, financial resources and adequate frameworks/mechanisms at the AU, mean that mediation processes often take an improvised or reactive approach, rather than an institutionalized procedure. Consequently, some participants advocated for an integrated approach to mediation in regional conflicts by the AU through the constructive engagement and partnership with Regional Economic Communities such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the East African Community (EAC), the Arab Magreb Union (AMU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Interestingly, some participants even canvassed for women to be given a bigger and more defined role to play in mediation of conflicts in Africa on the premise that they are better communicators, central actors and "right holders" in any process that addresses peace, security, human rights and sustainable development. At the end, many agreed that in comparison to the human and economic cost associated with violent conflicts and the consequent financial costs of peacekeeping operations, developing the AU's mediation capacity and expertise would be an inexpensive venture indeed (Nathan, 2009).

Finally, another way that communication can be used to resolve or manage conflicts in Africa is by planned and consistent investment in the development of communication and information systems and infrastructure. As has been noted earlier, in many countries in Africa, disparities based on unequal share of economic resources, lack of consensus on democratic issues and governance, problems of identity, of ideology or of religion, contribute to the development of conflicts. However, the source of its decline to violence can, in many instances, be attributed to insufficient information; differing levels of education; inadequate knowledge of each other's culture; an awareness of people's basic rights and responsibilities, and the inability to exercise those rights (UNESCO, 1998). Proper dissemination of information, especially in times of conflict, is comparable perhaps to taking a lighted candle into a dark room. That is why

Terrorist Organizations like the Taliban and the Boko Haram are always desperate to control or restrict the flow of information to their members because it is always a lot easier to manipulate the emotions of individuals involved in a conflict if they do not have access to contrary sources of information. In a way, it is comforting to note that in the last decade, the use of the internet, mobile phones, televisions, radios, newspapers, digital media, social media, and so many other new communication platforms has remarkably improved in Africa. Nevertheless, there is a need to intensify efforts to continue to reach the majority of Africans who still reside in rural areas where there are no access to these innovative new ways of communication with clear and consistent information, especially in times of conflict. To this end, it is suggested that the AU, through policy initiatives at the continental level, should articulate and promote a communication strategy that is integrative of both traditional and modern means of communication as well as encourage investments towards the development of educational and communication facilities as a means of lifting human resource capabilities and expanding information access to every nook and cranny of the continent. Surprisingly, proper dissemination of relevant information may be all that could be required to correct the wrong perceptions and assuage the associated grievances that usually aggravate violent reactions.

## CONCLUSION

There is nothing new or extraordinary about conflicts in Africa. Just like in other parts of the world, conflicts are inevitable as long as human relationships exist. As a matter of fact, lack of conflict, they say, only signifies the absence of a meaningful social interaction. On its own, conflict is neither good nor bad. Some conflicts are actually necessary for positive changes to occur in society, like in South Africa, for instance, where conflict was necessary to bring an oppressive apartheid regime to an end. What makes a conflict bad, most of the time is the way it was managed or resolved.

The consequence of failure in the management or resolution of conflicts is usually severe, devastating and sometimes unimaginable. Africa as a continent has suffered so much in this respect, not only because of the loss of millions of innocent lives and the destruction of valuable assets and property but also in terms of the economic, social and political emasculation of the continent, associated with various tales of “arrested development”. Indeed, the importance of developing conflict management capabilities both at the regional and at the continental level through intergovernmental organizations can never be overemphasized.

In barely 10 years of its existence, the AU has been confronted with enormous challenges, especially in the management of conflicts within the region. Considering its lack of experience, expertise and resources, the organization has done remarkably well. There are still, of course, a lot of difficulties and grey areas but “work is in progress”. It is also important to note that the Regional Economic communities are playing a very pivotal and commendable role in managing conflicts within their regions. This may be because they have also realized that there can be no economic development without peace. Going forward, the AU may need to devise a comprehensive and integrated approach to conflict management in the continent that will involve the constructive partnership with the RECs, the UN and other multinational agencies as a new way of getting the job done. The idea of working in partnership with the UN in Sudan through UNAMID is a brilliant one that should be expanded to include the RECs so that synergy and much better results can be obtained.

The good news is that violent conflicts in Africa are on the decline. From 2002-2007, the combined total of interstate and intrastate conflicts declined by 64 % from 39 to 14, while the official battle related deaths over the same period decreased by over 70 % from 9,368 to 2,727 (ACCORD, 2010). Although the number of countries facing violent conflicts has declined in recent years, the complex challenges that remain include: consolidating the peace, rebuilding state institutions, and rejuvenating economic activity in countries emerging from conflicts. Therefore, there is every need for the AU to strengthen its conflict management capabilities and sustain the current momentum in order to avoid a relapse of the continent to the wild days of the 90s.

The establishment of the ASF and other ancillary agencies is commendable but it is also obvious that Africa, on its own, can still not fund peacekeeping missions. The experience derived from AMIB, AMIS, and AMISOM clearly confirms this fact and should induce a rethink and review of extant strategies. This paper recommends that the AU should explore the prospect of using communication more in its approach to conflict resolution and management. To this extent, it is suggested that traditional methods of communication and conflict management in Africa should be rejuvenated and integrated with modern and new means of communication while organs of the AU that depend on communication like the CEWS and the ACJ should be further strengthened and expanded to respond more effectively to the challenge of peacemaking in a rapidly changing world. This approach will be definitely more proactive and cost-effective than peacekeeping and could save Africa millions of lives, dollars and valuable time. As a matter of policy, AU should aim towards resolving conflicts before they degenerate into armed hostilities because most times, when violence erupts, there is really no peace to keep.

## REFERENCES

- ACCORD (2010). "Towards enhancing the capacity of the African Union in Mediation": A report Based on the Seminar Organized by the African Union (AU) Commission, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. 15-16 October 2009
- Adebajo, A (2008). The peace keeping travails of the AU and the regional economic communities. In: Akokpari, J., Ndinga-Muvumba, A. & Murthi, T. eds. The African Union and its institutions. Auckland and Cape Town, Jacana Media and the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR).
- Afolabi, B.T (2009). Peacemaking in the ECOWAS region: challenges and prospects. Conflict Trends, 2, ACCORD, Durban.
- African Union (2000). Constitutive Act of the African Union: Lome: 11 July
- African Union (2002). Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, Durban: 9 July
- African Union (2003). Protocols on the Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the African Union, Maputo: 11 July
- Allen, James. E (2010). Impediments to the Effectiveness of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Dafur (UNAMID). Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth
- Bob-Manuel, Ineba (2000). "A Cultural Approach to Conflict Transformation: An African Traditional Experience". Term Paper Written for the Course: "Culture of Peace and Education". Stadtschlaining Austria: European Peace University



- Boshoff, Henri, Very Waldermar and Rautenbach, George (2010). *The Burundi Peace Process: From Civil War to Conditional Peace*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies
- Boutros-Ghali, B (1992). *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping*. UN: New York
- Ekengard, Arvid (2008). *The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS): Experiences and Lessons Learned*. FOI, Swedish Defense Research Agency
- Gomes, S (2008). The peacemaking role of the OAU and the AU: a comparative analysis. In: Akokpari, J., Ndinga-Muvumba, A. & Murthi, T. eds. *The African Union and its institutions*. Auckland and Cape Town, Jacana Media, and the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR).
- Jibril, Abdelgabi (2010). *Past and Future of UNAMID: Tragic Failure or Glorious Success? Dafur Relief and Documentation Center, Geneva*
- Makinda, Samuel, M. and Okomu, F. Wajula (2008), *The African Union: Challenges of Globalization, Security and Governance*. London: Routledge
- Mottiar, S. & Van Jaarsveld, S (2009). *Mediating peace in Africa, securing conflict prevention*. ACCORD. Durban.
- Murithi, T. & Hudson, J (2006). *United Nations mediation experience in Africa*. Policy Advisory Group Seminar, Centre for Conflict Resolution, Cape Town.
- Murithi, Tim (2008). *The African Union's Evolving Role in Peace Operations: Africa Security Review*. Vol. 17 Institute for Security Studies, South Africa Press
- Mwanasali, M (2008). From non-interference to non-indifference: the emerging doctrine of conflict prevention in Africa. In: Akokpari, J., Ndinga-Muvumba, A. & Murthi, T. eds. *The African Union and its institutions*. Auckland and Cape Town, Jacana Media, and the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR).
- Nathan, L (2005). *Mediation and the African Union's Panel of the Wise*. In: 'Discussion Paper No 10: A Submission to the Commission for Africa', 2005, Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics, London
- Nathan, L (2007). *Plan of Action to Build the African Unions's Mediation Capacity*. Presented at the seminar "Towards Enhancing the Capacity of the African Union in Mediation. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: AU Commission, 15-16 October
- OAU (1963) *Charter of the Organization of African Unity*: Addis Ababa.1963
- Peen Rodt, Annemarie (2011). *African Mission in Burundi: The Successful Management of Violent Ethno-Political Conflict*. Ethno-politics Papers: No 10, May 2011
- Svensson, I (2007). Bargaining, bias and peace brokers: How rebels commit to peace. *Journal of Peace Research*, 44 (2)
- Tavares, Rodrigo (2010). *Regional Security: The Capacity of International Organizations*. London: Routledge
- UNESCO (1998). *Communications for Peace-building: Conceptual Framework and Strategy*: UN System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa. Paris: December 1998

Annex: List of Abbreviations

AAU	Assembly of the African Union
ACCORD:	African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Conflicts
ACJ:	African Court of Justice
AMIB:	African Union Mission in Burundi
AMIS:	African Union Mission in Sudan
AMU:	Arab Magreb Union
ASF:	African Standby Force
AU:	African Union
AUA:	African Union Authority
CEWS:	Continental Early Warning System
DDR:	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DRC:	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAC:	East African Community
EC:	Executive Council
ECCAS:	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS:	Economic Community of West African States
ESCC:	Economic, Social and Cultural Council
FRODEBU:	Front for Democracy in Burundi
GoS:	Government of Sudan
ICJ:	International Court of Justice
IGAD:	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
JEM:	Justice and Equity Movement
MSC:	Military Staff Committee
OAU:	Organization of African Unity
ONUB:	United Nations Peace Operations in Burundi
PAP:	Pan African Parliament
PF:	Peace Fund
POW:	Panel of the Wise
PRC:	Permanent Representative Committee
R2P:	Responsibility to Protect
REC(s):	Regional Economic Community (Communities)
SADC:	Southern African Development Community
SPLA/M:	Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement
UN:	United Nations
UNAMID:	United Nations, African Mission in Dafur
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPRONA:	Union for National Progress