



Africa's Faulty Towers - A continent Mired in Unending Conflicts

Foday Darboe

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When the bells rang around the world for the new millennium, so were African leaders making promises about socio-economic and political developments to their respective countries. That was the year 2000. It's now 2008, and how far has Africa gone in terms of socio-economic and political developments?

To answer this question, it is important to note that Africa entered the twenty-first century with political uncertainty, economic decay, social turbulence and numerous civil wars. Recent years have seen certain regions of the continent involved in war and internal or external conflicts - seven or more countries are directly involved in the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia and Darfur and many other civil wars.

Africa is dealing with the menace of ruthless, fanatical, and heavily armed authoritarian leaders who are implacably opposed to fundamental human rights and the rule of law. This is the serious challenge for Africa and Africans.

The Doctrine of Power and Corruption

The increasing demands for liberty and related values such as equal opportunity, political participation, and justice must be confronted in contemporary Africa. Political leaders have the capacity to either satisfy these needs or to repress them. For example, in Zimbabwe and Kenya, when elections results did not provide the results desired by these governments, the results were simply dismissed, giving rise to bitter and violent conflicts - though in Zimbabwe the violence was all on one side - the Mugabe government had directed militia against its own people.

On the same token, political events across the continent are intertwined with each other. A political disorder that develops in one part of the region can quickly spread to other countries in the region. When violence breaks out in Uganda or Rwanda, it affects politics in places like Burundi or Tanzania. When killing erupted in Liberia and Sierra Leone, it affected politics in places like Guinea.

Political corruption, lack of respect for rule of law, and human rights violations are all common reasons given for some of the causes of Africa's problems. Effective institutions of political participation that could vigorously defend individual political freedoms have yet to take control in many countries of the region. The lack of balance of power enables heads of states to embezzle government funds, leaving populations of rich countries in painful poverty.

The institutions that are supposed to create the checks and balances have been corrupted by brutal leaders in the likes of Presidents Yahya Jammeh of the Gambia, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Idriss Deby of Chad, Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, Omar Hassan Ahmed El-bashir of Sudan, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Mwai Kibaki of Kenya, Jose Eduardo Dos Santos of Angola, João Bernardo Viera of Guinea-Bissau, Lansana Conté of Guinea Conakry, etc. These 10 political leaders combined, have spent more than 203 years in power and there is no end in sight of their rule. In general, many African leaders stay in power as long as they can forcibly do so.

Such African leaders are the architects of economic and political failures in Africa. They have overstayed their welcome and who knows how many billions they have amassed. The current institutions and governments in some African countries are even more oppressive than the despised colonial administrations that Africans have completely and outrightly rejected.

Corruption in African is a curse with dramatic consequences. It puts a brake on economic growth, increases



Gambian President Yahya Jammeh: Africa's newest, ruthless dictator

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Foday Darboe

Website:

<http://www.mcnair-progr...>

Email:

fodayd@pdx.edu

social differences and makes integral sustainable development impossible. Since today's world is interdependent, corruption and bribery not only exert their disastrous influences locally where they are perpetrated, but also these criminal practices have repercussions on the global society.

The pursuit of power and wealth are often symbolically synonymous among African leaders. As George Ayittey wrote:

"The ruling elites do not enter government to serve but to fleece people. In fact politics is the gateway to fabulous wealth in Africa. Their primary instinct is to loot the national treasury, perpetuate themselves in power, and brutally suppress all dissent and opposition. And the worst part is, they do not invest their booty in their own African countries but choose to stash it in Swiss and foreign bank accounts".

The siphoning of Africa's riches by our greedy political leaders is a serious contributing factor to most of the conflicts on the continent. Corruption and violence have both tended to metastasize across our beautiful continent; treatment is needed for both.

The Bretton Woods Effect

Less visible, and as invidious is the economic colonialism at the hands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, this can be as poisonous as was the direct European imperial domination of Africa. Their program of allocating loans to African countries and the attached debt payment policies have devastated economic development on national and micro-economic planning levels. Debt payment is used as an efficient tool. It ensures access to raw materials and infrastructure on the cheapest possible terms. Their phrase "short term pain for long term gain" seems to be long term pain for short term gain. These institutions should be reformed to reflect the economic growth of all Africans and not the political gangsters and their cronies.

Many African states today have a massive foreign debt and an economy which relies heavily on foreign aid and the international rhetoric surrounding Africa policy, has continued to emphasize on humanitarians efforts. When raw materials generate massive valuable exports and minimal help to any nation's people, that is robbery.

"Africa's First World War"

The majority of Africa's conflicts are intra-state in nature. They are about political power. Power to loot resources; power to amass resources to oneself and to family members; and power to oppress one's enemies. As such, the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has all these elements. This war by far is the worst war Africa has ever seen. It is escalating rapidly as power struggles between various rebel groups are exacerbated by military support given to the opposing parties. It is a proxy war that involves Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia supporting government forces against rebels backed by Uganda and Rwanda. The United Nations, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International all estimate that so many people have died - it is the deadliest conflict since World War II. This war is invisible because it is in Africa, and in most cases, the West is hesitant about Africa in times of crises.

Can the international community afford to witness another genocide in Africa? This is the very good question modern contemporary scholars of conflict resolution continue to ponder.

What is certain, is that hundreds are dying daily - either direct or indirect as consequences of this war. At the heart of the conflict are Congo's natural resources, which are being exploited by unscrupulous politicians, elites and multinational corporations. The war in DRC is a legacy of the "divide and rule" policies of colonial masters; the Cold War made hot in much of Africa - Mobutu's kleptocratic iron fist rules and the merchants of war machines who are profiteering from this struggle for resources. It is indeed the staging grounds for economic exploitations, and now China, and India, have taken a forefront by investing, and evoking images of new surrogate struggles that leave Africans as victims of more violence and resource robbery.

Africa's Future

Corrupt leadership and rapacious external powers are Africa's Faulty Twin Towers - and the challenge to African youth is to remodel them into shining beacons built on shared power, shared riches, education and infrastructural development and self-financed social safety nets for all.

Our generation ought to learn all the inefficiency the continent encountered. We can build a system that could put an end to decades of violent conflicts. We can construct a framework of social, economic and political institutions that would bring enduring peace to the continent. Perpetual peace is so overdue in Africa. The people in Africa are not the problem. It's the political leaders who have lowered the moral standings of Africa and Africans in the global community.

We ask, how can we play a role in paving that road so the challenges facing the next generation will be easier than the ones we face today? Will the young generation lift Africa up? We can. We shall see, and only time will tell.

