PEACE EDUCATION AND PEACEBUILDING IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: A CONFLICT-SENSITIVE APPROACH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract*

It is an increasingly acknowledged fact that one of the most effective ways universities in war-affected countries can be functionally relevant to the everyday needs and challenges of their immediate environment is by promoting peacebuilding through peace education. This paper explores the role of universities in fostering peace education in diverse post-conflict and conflict-prone countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, the research investigates the evolution and strategies of conflict-sensitive peace education in the context of universities in post-conflict and volatile societies in Africa with the object of assessing how impactful they have been. The study also analyses the problems and challenges associated with promoting peace education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Data for the study have been generated from secondary sources, as well as a raft of conflict intervention, regional security and peacebuilding projects the researcher has taken part in across a number of conflict-prone and war-affected African countries (notably, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, DRC, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and South Sudan).

Introduction

Universities have traditionally been concerned with imparting specialized knowledge and skills in various fields of study capable of helping beneficiaries to make useful contributions to societal development and also earn meaningful livelihood from a legitimate occupation.

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There is increasing interest in the role of higher education in post-conflict societies, and the potential contribution it can make to long-term peacebuilding (British Council, 2013:37).

From the experience of diverse research and capacity-building projects completed in recent years in a number of post-conflict countries in Africa like Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC, northern Uganda, Burundi, and South Sudan, it is apparent that key stakeholders such as the state, society and the private and voluntary sectors have a twofold expectation about the role of universities, namely: (a) that universities should provide employment-relevant education and training; and (b) that universities should shed part of their ivory tower pomposity and aloofness to reach out, and be functionally relevant to the everyday challenges and needs of their host communities (Omeje ed., 2009; LUGUSI Network Newsletter, 2010-2012; Stiasny & Gore eds., 2014).

The conventional approach in many post-conflict societies like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Northern Uganda where the idea of universities playing a role in peacebuilding has been embraced is to confine such a role to the social sciences and humanities, faculties where new courses such as peace and conflict studies are offered. Consequently and too often, the idea of conflict-sensitive education and peacebuilding is further limited to students enrolled in some of the new emerging courses like peace studies, conflict resolution, security studies, governance and leadership studies, and so forth. This restrictive approach ostensibly misses the mark as it tends to exclude the vast majority of university students enrolled in mainstream social sciences (e.g. sociology, political science and economics) and the considerably non-cognate courses such as the natural and applied sciences, from the vital knowledge and skills of conflict-sensitive education and peacebuilding.

Peace Education in Sub-Saharan African Universities

Peace education has been defined as a process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour changes that will enable children, youths and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level (Fountain, 1999:1; UNESCO, 2002). Training people about various aspects of peace and the strategies for peacebuilding is seen by experts as one of the key ways of
rebuilding, stabilizing and transforming a society that has been through devastating conflict. Peace and conflict-sensitive education is ultimately aimed to help people understand, deconstruct and transform deep-rooted structures of prejudice, suspicion and hostilities, as well as attitudes that tend to perceive a recourse to violence as legitimate (Brown, 2012).

Whilst modern peace education emerged in the west as a consequence of World War II and the correlated events of the Cold War, proactive peace education in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) began in the 1990s following the end of the Cold War and what was popularly known as “the African crisis” (Arrighi, 2002:5). The African crisis was a term coined in the 1980s for describing the series of convoluted developmental disaster that beset many African economies in the 1980s and 1990s, aggravated by the World Bank/IMF Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), and culminating in varied intensities of state failure and armed conflicts. Prior to the end of the Cold War, a limited number of studies of African conflicts were undertaken by different policy think tanks (mostly development studies-oriented e.g. CODESRIA), academic researchers within the various mainstream social sciences and allied disciplines, as well as area studies research centres and departments in the west. Like in most other fields of study, the vast majority of the subject specialists that pioneers African peace and conflict research were Africans and Africanists of expatriate origin who were mainly trained in the west. The fact that these pioneers were mainly trained in the west meant that they were imbued with non-African (western) conceptual tools, imaginations of reality, outlooks and research methodologies, a phenomenon that has continued to vitiate the development of a regional pool of expertise and indigenous capacity for research (Brock-Utne, 1998). Significantly, this epistemological and methodological limitation is not exclusive to peace research; it is a challenge that cuts across the entire spectrum of higher education in Africa and partly linked to the [neo]colonial foundation and heritage of African educational systems.

There are a number of challenges to peace education in African higher education which include the general suspicion associated with the western origin and push for peace education (i.e. that peace education is subtly designed to foist western cultures and ideologies on Africa), inadequate and weak curriculum, paucity of requisite expertise and weak capacity amongst available scholars, shortage of research and teaching materials (relevant books, journals, libraries, etc), and limited employment and career development opportunities for subject-area graduates and practitioners – a problem that is clearly linked to the weak
absorptive capacities of African economies and the short-term nature of many donor-driven projects that create jobs in the peace and conflict industry (see Francis ed., 2008; Alimba, 2013).

For peace education to be effective, experts argue that it has to be comprehensively planned, embedded and implemented both within and outside the different levels of the educational sector. Hence, whilst the formal educational sector comprising the primary, secondary and tertiary levels are recognised as key to a vibrant peace education, many experts also recognise that in order to register the maximum impact in society, peace education should also integrate the informal and semi-formal training sectors. The informal sectors would be the role of the family, religious institutions, mass media and community-based agencies as channels and networks of political socialisation which can also be deliberately targeted as institutional structures for education-for-peace. The semi-formal sector would include the role of special short-term training and capacity-building programmes such as workshops and seminars in generating, spreading and strengthening a peace culture.

To a large extent, peace education in Africa seems to be largely focused on the formal education sector, especially the level of tertiary education. At other levels of formal education, traditional citizenship or civic education tends to be more prevalent, although in many post-conflict societies like Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Liberia, and Uganda citizenship education (sometimes structured as part of Social Studies) at primary and post-primary levels have significant lessons in non-violent methods of dispute settlement and peacebuilding (see LUGUSI Network Newsletter, 2010-2012; WANEP, 2012).

Given the proliferation of structures of conflict in Africa (both structural and active violence), the limitations of peace education must be clearly underscored. It will be practically misleading and futile to hinge the solution to African conflicts on peace education which seems to be one of the common mistakes made by some experts and practitioners. As important as it is, well-structured and effectively delivered comprehensive peace education cannot be a substitute for political and economic reforms, democratization and good governance. Many independent and authoritative research studies have demonstrated that effective political, constitutional and economic reforms are some of the indispensable conditions to sustainable peace, stability and development on the continent (see Moyo, 2009; Ascher & Mirovitskaya, 2013).

It will suffice to use this section to reflect on a raft of externally-funded education-for-peace projects I have taken part in developing and implementing since 2004 at both the Africa Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies (later renamed the John & Elnora Ferguson Centre for African Studies), University of Bradford in the UK and the United States International University in Nairobi, Kenya. A few of the projects had already been initiated about a year before I joined the Africa Centre at Bradford University. The core of these peace education-related projects has taken place in war-affected and volatile conflict-prone countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda, DRC and Kenya. The projects have been variously-funded by the DFID/British Council; the West Minster Foundation for Democracy and the Allan and Nesta Ferguson Trust. I have also been part of similar practical peacebuilding capacity-building projects (as opposed to university-based peace education-related projects) in Nigeria, Burundi, South Sudan and Rwanda. For want of an appropriate terminology, I have called the paradigm of peace education discussed in this section “the Bradford Model,” tribute to one of the world’s largest and most famous centres of excellence in modern peace education. There is the need to caution that what I have described as the Bradford Model of peace education in this paper has not been essentially or entirely originated by Bradford University. I have attributed the model cautiously to Bradford University to underscore the influential and passionate contribution of the university in re-developing, enriching and operationalizing the model over the years (especially in the past decade), not least in SSA.

The Bradford model of peace education is distinguished by certain operational and practical rubrics that are systematically reflected in the project activities that follow. The intellectual and epistemological foundation of the model is the principle that peace is knowable (literally “discernible” by subject experts through research); teachable (through knowledge, values and skills impartation) and learnable (internalization of what is imparted); ultimately changing the attitudes and behaviours of people in a desired non-violent direction and impacting the entire social structure, cultural norms and institutions of society. Having been through years of turbulent conflict, many paradigm proponents and sympathisers argue, war-affected and volatile conflict-prone countries such as those of SSA ostensibly have the greatest need for peace education (see Francis, 2009; Alimba, 2013; Stiasny, Mary & Tim Gore eds., 2014). These philosophical principles are more or less at the heart of modern peace education, and it is a position that many structuralist and post-structuralist intellectuals have problem with – a debate I do not intend to pursue in this paper. Below is an operational articulation of the Bradford Model:

In post-war Sierra Leone, the Bradford model of capacity-building project we executed was aimed to promote peace education in universities; and peace education, human rights and democratic governance community policing in the security sector (2003 – 2008). In post-war Liberia, on the other hand, we worked on a different project aimed to re-invent higher education for conflict transformation and peacebuilding (2006 – 2008). The rationale was that
in the post-war dispensation, Sierra Leone and Liberian universities and security forces (mostly the police) should be capacitated to play functional roles in:

1. Building the peace by initiating or participating in various national and community-based peacebuilding projects, e.g. security sector reforms (SSR), disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of rebels, child soldiers and ex-combatants; confidence-building measures between the civilian populations and security forces, etc.

2. Ensuring peaceful resolution or transformation of conflicts as they arise (University of Bradford Peace Studies News, 2005 & 2007:4-5).

Besides universities, the police forces were specifically targeted for these capacity-building projects because of their deplorable record of systematic violations of human rights, their apparent lack of knowledge of basic human rights principles, the history of their involvement in anti-democratic activities and their destructive roles in civil wars and violent conflicts in the two countries (ibid).

We sort to achieve the capacity-building project goals by:

1. Developing new study programme in two Liberian universities - University of Liberia in Monrovia and Cuttington University in Gbanga (Diploma and BA degree programmes in Peace and Conflict resolution) and three Sierra Leonean universities - Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone (Diploma/BA degree courses in Peace & Conflict Studies), Njala University College (Diploma & MA degrees in Peace and Development Studies) and Milton Maggai College of Education & Technology (Diploma/BA degree in Peace Education).

    The curriculum development and review workshops (CDRWs) as we often called them emphasized in their pedagogical contents an integrative blend of both the global/international and the local/regional realities, as well as the “theory – praxis” nexus.

2. Strengthening existing courses in cognate disciplines (like Political Science, Sociology, History/African Studies, Psychology and Law) to teach practical modules and topics in peace, conflict, security and conflict resolution. We had to develop a number of stand-alone undergraduate and MA degree courses in peace and conflict studies which we mainstreamed into the existing curricular in the observed cognate disciplines. Some of the course modules we developed had such titles as: The Sociology of Peace & Conflict in International Relations, The African Practices and Mechanisms of Conflict Management, Methods of Conflict Analysis, Peace and Security Issues in Africa, Leadership and the Culture of Peace; Conflict Prevention, Peacekeeping and Peace Consolidation; Humanitarian Interventions and Conflicts in Africa, Conflict Resolution and Development: Applied Skills, etc.

3. Involvement of West Yorkshire Police in England in the development/review of community policing strategies in the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and Liberian National Police (LNP). In addition, we facilitated the establishment of a staff development visit of selected SLP and LNP officers to the Bishopsgarth West Yorkshire Police Training and Development Centre in Wakefield. The focus of the training programmes in Wakefield and similar capacity-building workshops we organised in Freetown and Monrovia was mainly on strengthening Community Policing and Police – Public relations.

4. Organizing specialised training workshops on the core values and pedagogy of education-for-peace for lecturers in the Social Sciences, Humanities and Law. In Liberia, instructors and senior officers of the LNP were invited to these workshops while in Sierra Leone we organized series of parallel workshops for instructors in the SLP training school.

5. Provision of resource materials, mostly relevant textbooks to support teaching, research and learning in the beneficiary institutions and police academies. To each of the participating universities and police
academies, we bought and supplied between 40 – 60 current and relevant textbooks. In each occasion, we generated a list of books from the local project coordinators in the SSA institutions concerned, which in most cases we had to fundamentally revise in order to make the books more current and relevant from our perspective.

6. Short-term staff development visits between the University of Bradford and the Sierra Leonean and Liberian partner institutions to promote curriculum participation and learning. Two persons from each African partner institution were usually invited to Bradford for staff development capacity-building opportunity for periods of less than two weeks in each project year to help them acquire a first-hand exposure to the Bradford University programme, consult with relevant experts, audit lectures of interest to them, use library resources and photocopy relevant materials, and also to present public seminars to students/lectures broadly on the war-to-peace transition and educational conditions in their country.

7. Promoting collaborative research and publications amongst lecturers in participating universities. A number of university-level readers were published through these various projects, the most notable perhaps being *War to Peace Transition: Conflict Intervention and Peacebuilding in Liberia* (Lanham-Maryland: University Press of America, 2009). Newsletters and periodicals were also published to document and disseminate the achievements, best practices and challenges of the projects (see *Department of Peace Studies Annual Reports, 2004 – 2008*).

Elsewhere in Uganda and Nigeria the Africa Centre executed some more or less similar projects in partnership with different local universities and other stakeholders. In Uganda for instance, we developed a triangular partnership for capacity-building in peace education involving the University of Bradford (Africa Centre), two Ugandan-based universities (Makerere University and Mbarara University for Science and technology [MUST]), and a Kampala-based NGO – Advocate Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE). The project was originally funded by the British Council/DFID in 2003/2004 to help strengthen the African partner universities’ for postgraduate degree training programmes in Human Rights, Peace and Conflict Studies and Peace and Development Studies (see *Department of Peace Studies Annual Report, 2004:7*). This triangular network, originally known by the acronym MACOMBA Link, was later expanded in 2006 (courtesy of the Ferguson Trust grant) to include five additional Ugandan universities (Nkozi Catholic University, Islamic University, Gulu University, Mbale University and Kampala University) to help them develop or strengthen their capacities for different aspects of peace education, the notable additional area of thematic focus being Religion and Peace Studies (*University of Bradford Peace Studies News, 2006:14*). In Nigeria, we worked closely with the Centre for Peace and conflict Management (CECOMPS) at the University of Jos between 2004 and 2005 to develop a new Postgraduate Diploma programme in Peace Studies and Conflict Management, which became the foundation for a Master’s degree programme in Conflict and Peace Studies later to be introduced by CECOMPS in 2008 (see *Department of Peace Studies Annual Report, 2004:6; CECOMPS, 2007:1*).

In the DRC, our emphasis was on capacitating universities for peacebuilding and conflict transformation, notably the University of Kinshasa (2006 -2008) and University of Lubumbashi (2006 – 2012). In Kenya and Northern Uganda, I led a project management team that worked with the United States International University in Nairobi and Gulu University in Gulu, Northern Uganda (2009 – 2012) in various areas of capacity-building. The capacity-
building projects in the participating universities in the DRC, Kenya and Northern Uganda have two key objectives:

- To develop the institutional and collaborative capacities of the partner Universities to play applied functional roles in conflict and development intervention.
- To expand and strengthen the employability skills and opportunities of undergraduate and graduate students in the cognate fields of study (LUGUSI Network Newsletters, 2010-2012).

Funded by the British Council EAP/DelPHE grant schemes, these projects were developed against the background of:

- Multi-faceted and interlocking conflicts and wars that have blighted the African Great Lakes region for over the past two decades.
- Poor capacity for practical conflict and development intervention in existing higher education curricula.
- Traditional inclination of higher education partnerships in Africa towards vertical cooperation with Western institutions, with the result that collaboration within the region is highly limited (see LUGUSI Network Newsletters, 2010-2012; Omeje & Hepner, 2013:1-2).

To help address some of the capacity-deficits, various project activities were developed and implemented in accordance with the quintessential Bradford model. These include:

1) Review and strengthening of the Peace, Conflict and Development Studies curricula of the three partner universities using the operational frameworks of twelve different collaborative and individual university-based workshops. Some new practical modules and training programmes (e.g. student work placement/internships, study visits to relevant organizations, and community service schemes) were developed or in some case strengthened at different levels (BA, MA and PhD). One of the major innovations we introduced in this curriculum review was the involvement of university students and representatives of the relevant employment sector (international organisations, government agencies and civil society) in the workshop, an initiative that had immense enriching value.

2) Regional cooperation and inter-university faculty (teaching staff) exchange visits between partner institutions to promote curriculum participation in teaching, research, students' counselling/thesis supervision, seminars, and publication. Under this collaborative initiative, lecturers were cross-posted between different partner universities over a limited period of one to two weeks in each project cycle of one year.

3) Research and publication opportunity/skill acquisition programme for project partners, leading to production of a relevant edited book project useable in research/teaching in the area of peace, conflict and development studies in the African Great Lakes Region (AGLR) and beyond. The book is titled Conflict and Peacebuilding in the African Great Lakes Region (Indiana University Press, 2013).

4) Provision of a limited number of relevant textbooks (40 – 50 books) in Peace, Conflict and Development Studies for the comparatively under-resourced partner institutions (University of Lubumbashi and Gulu University).

5) Career counselling services for students using both internal and external professional counsellors. In Gulu University, career counselling was complemented by community outreach programmes to, among other things, inspire war-affected school children and provide practical training in post-conflict counselling/victim rehabilitation for MA students of Development Studies and Conflict Transformation.

6) Production of an annual project newsletter for dissemination of information about project activities, challenges, and opportunities for higher education partnerships in the region. The annual newsletters were distributed in both hardcopy and electronic formats [using email and the project website: http://lugusi.usiu.ac.ke/aboutus/background/lugusi.htm] (see LUGUSI Network Newsletter, 2010-2012).
Broadly, in the way it has progressively evolved, the Bradford Model is a substantially flexible, decentralised, integrative and participatory model of curriculum planning and implementation in peace education. It is not entirely full-proof, because its strengths and weaknesses have become more apparent to me over the years that I have been a practitioner of the model. Many curriculum developers and practitioners introducing peace education in Africa and perhaps elsewhere tend to wittingly or unwittingly operationalize the Bradford Model project activities either in isolation or combination. Is there a discernible alternative or parallel to the Bradford Model of peace education in African higher education? Apparently, the contrast to the Bradford Model would be the centralized approach to curriculum planning in peace education which tends to be prevalent in many African universities, especially (but not exclusively) in the Francophone countries. Under the centralised paradigm, a uniform curriculum is centrally developed, oftentimes by the relevant government agency, and introduced across the entire spectrum of university education within the jurisdiction of the authorities. In some versions of centralized curriculum planning, the task of developing a new curriculum could be outsourced to some expert consultants or executed by a college of technical experts, who develop all aspects of the curriculum, including goals, content, learning experiences/outcomes and evaluation strategies. A number of western universities engaged in race to introduce peace education in war-affected and volatile conflict-prone African countries adopt this version of decentralised model by which they often interpose a draft curriculum they have developed abroad to the beneficiary universities for adoption *mutatis mutandis*. Centralized curriculum planning is most prevalent in lower levels of education (primary and post-primary) in different parts of the world where educational curriculum is seen as a vehicle for transmitting national ideology and fostering or preserving a cherished national culture (Makaye *et al.*, 2013:42). Under a centralized curriculum model, the classroom instructor, teacher or lecturer is tasked with mainly implementing the curriculum, albeit in practice the room for flexibility in curriculum interpretation and delivery is not completely taken away from the implementer, particularly at the university level. The centralized model of peace education curriculum planning has its recognised strengths and weaknesses (see Makaye *et al.*, 3013).
A Critical Overview and the Way Forward

For methodological and analytical convenience, I have limited this empirical reflection on peace and conflict-sensitive education in SSA to the practical projects I have directly taken part in since January 2004. Over the period I have been part of the Bradford model by directly working in the Bradford University’s Africa Centre or been associated with its “brand”, the Centre has implemented a considerable number of peace education projects in countries like Ethiopia, DRC, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe which I was not privileged to be part of. The Centre has also provided advisory services and related technical support to different international institutions and research/policy think tanks on peace and conflict intervention programmes in Africa.

Assessing what we have done over the years in promoting the Bradford Model is somewhat problematic being that I could be easily charged with having a conflict of interest in the matter as I have been a longstanding actor and participant. However, from the standpoint of constructivist epistemology, it has become a well-established fact that there scarcely exists any objective social knowledge, completely detached or disconnected from the epistemic subject's actions, worldview and constructs (Breuer & Roth, 2003:1). I am therefore more methodologically inclined to the post-structuralist paradigm of personal reflexivity in research, which espouses an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of ‘meanings’ throughout the research process; progressively reflecting upon and striving to manage the ways in which one’s own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identity compete to shape the research and knowledge production processes (Willig, 2001:10). Furthermore, it is eminently timely that one reflects on the approach, strategies and limitations of peace education in SSA because I am not aware of any scholarly works that have seriously reflected on the practical works we and other stakeholders have done in promoting peace education in Africa over the years.

One of the greatest challenges in this professional enterprise is that there has not been any rigorous external audit or evaluation of the large number of donor-driven peace education-related programmes that have emerged in many African universities since the 1990s. None of the donor-driven peace education projects I have been part of has ever been subjected to an independent external evaluation with a view to determining their content-relevance and appropriateness, sensitivity to local conflicts and related factors, local delivery capacity and
strategies, quality assurance, sustainability plan, impact on the domestic environment, etc. For administrative convenience perhaps, most donors rely on the evaluation programmes proposed by the grant recipients which in most cases are based on participants’ internal evaluation of specific activities of the projects, such as capacity-building workshops. Grant recipients have great manoeuvrability in the way they report these self-evaluations and therefore would often present a supportive report to the donors. Consequently, most local workshop and project participants feel a sense of honour and privilege to be part of these donor projects that usually provide them with additional income (in terms of per diem, stipends, travel allowances, etc) and therefore would in most case give a glowing evaluation feedback. The result is that in the end one does not really have a true picture about the desirability, operationality and impact of these supposedly well-meaning donor-driven peace education projects, including the Bradford model. To a more or lesser extent, one could possibly make a similar remark about most other non-donor driven educational programmes in SSA. Reliable and independent evaluation of the higher education study programmes is crucially important for progress assessment and development planning in SSA.

The second challenge, which seems related to the foregoing observation has to do with the empirical relevance of many peace education curricula that have been developed and are being implemented in Africa. I have been privileged to scrutinize dozens of these peace education-related curricula in SSA (both those I have been involved in developing and many others) and I hardly find anything that is significantly different between the curricula and those in western universities. Having facilitated dozens of curriculum development workshops in SSA where we have produced many of these curricula, I have always felt a personal frustration in challenging and inspiring workshop participants (mostly African academics trained in western social science epistemologies) to think creatively in ways that could give us an authentic African peace education curriculum. Francis (2009) has made a similar observation to substantiate this dilemma: “Most of the university programmes and dominant philosophy and educational systems have been patterned on the Northern universities; so they do not reflect the actual needs and aspirations of African communities, African societies, especially in countries emerging from wars and armed conflict. So relevance and appropriateness are some of the critical challenges facing universities and the higher education sector across Africa.”
The third and perhaps most compelling challenge is the parlous state of higher education sector in most war-affected and volatile conflict-prone states of SSA. Some of the defining characteristics and features of the higher education sector in countries wholly or partly affected by war and armed conflicts in Africa include extreme funding shortage, poor remuneration of lecturers and university staff, brain-drain, heavy reliance on donor funding and technical support, frequent and prolonged strike actions by university lecturers often associated with abysmal conditions of service; extremely weak, inadequate and collapsed infrastructures (classrooms, offices, students’ hostels, libraries, electricity, health clinics, water, ICT, etc), large lecturer – students ratio (often in excess of 1 lecturer per 300 students); a preponderance of locally trained, poorly skilled and demotivated lecturers; and perhaps most dismally extreme paucity of current literature. In fact, in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Northern Uganda and South Sudan we repeatedly came across many bullet-riddled and partially collapsed university classrooms, including a number of temporarily displaced departments and faculties located in war-torn and derelict public or private properties. In the absence of a strong private sector, the state remains the chief provider of higher education in these countries but given the weak economic base of most states (especially Burundi, South Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC and, to a lesser extent Uganda and Rwanda), the state is for the most part in an extremely weak position to fund, regulate and meet the growing demands for higher education in their countries (LUGUSI Network Newsletters 2010-2012; Mary Stiasny and Tim Gore eds., 2014). In terms of capacity, the states’ higher education regulatory bodies are as weakly capacitated, poorly resourced, shambolic and in most cases dysfunctional as the universities themselves. It is against this background that one needs to understand the predicament of peace education in volatile and war-affected countries in SSA.

The fourth and final point has to do with bureaucratic bottlenecks and undue delay in policy mainstreaming and institutional buy-in at both the university and government higher education management levels, without which the new peace education-related study programmes cannot be officially accredited, recognised or perhaps implemented. This problem however varies from one country to another. From my experience with the new peace education-related programmes I took part in developing, the problem of internal approval of new programmes by the university Senate was a lot quicker and more straight-forward to handle in Sierra Leone and Liberia compared to countries like Uganda and Kenya. External accreditation by the government regulatory body is problematic in virtually all the countries and could literally go one for ever, but the interesting thing is that most universities
have the flexibility to introduce a new study programme once they have been internally approved by the university authorities. The most frustrating example we came across was in DRC where an inflexibly centralised curriculum management system exists with the result that no university is allowed to introduce a new programme or subject on its own that is not approved by the central government ministry of higher education and uniformly introduced across all universities.

Moving forward, the remedy for some of the identified key challenges could be easily inferred. There is the need for independent and periodic evaluation of existing study programmes in SSA, especially the new donor-driven peace education programmes in order to make them context-relevant and conflict-sensitive. In countries emerging from war, donor-interests need to go beyond funding the development and mainstreaming of new university programmes in peace and conflict studies to include robustly investing in need assessment for local educational and training priorities, programme assessment, staff training and capacitation of higher education regulatory bodies, among others. Furthermore, research has shown that one of the major reasons why many poor developing countries emerging from war have a high risk of relapsing to armed conflict is because of the large number of unskilled and poorly skilled unemployed young people in these countries (Collier 2008; Brown 2012). It is therefore imperative that peace education-related study programmes, as well as all other university and non-university based training programmes be practically linked to employability opportunities and entrepreneurship education. Similarly, all other university and non-university level educational training programmes should have key aspects of peace education mainstreamed into their curricula. To be comprehensive and effective, peace education curricula in most war-affected and volatile conflict-prone countries of SSA should, among other things, also aim to redress the embedded culture of violence in these countries.

Social psychologists have shown that when people are exposed to a prolonged culture of violence and armed conflict, they are left with a twisted worldview that tends to perceive use of violence, aggressive behaviour and resort to disorder as a normal way of life (see Matlosa, 2003; Mutto et al., 2009). The consequences of perpetuating a culture of violence in society are more blatant for children and people who have lived all the cognitive stages of their lives under conditions of embedded hostilities, abuse and armed violence.
An analysis of the embedded culture of violence in many countries of SSA certainly makes greater sense against the backdrop of Africa’s population dynamics. In terms geo-demographic base factor, Africa’s population has witnessed a rapid increase since the 1970s. Africa’s population has grown from about 221 million in 1950 to 408 million in 1975, 796 million in 2000 and 1.1 billion in 2013 (UNFPA, 2010; World Bank, 2013). Among the many factors that have contributed to Africa’s population growth rate (e.g. decreasing infant and maternal mortality, gains made in combating infectious diseases and HIV, etc), the most significant is the fact that there is large number of women who, under circumstances of rapid cultural, socio-demographic and economic change, have no access to planning their families (UNFPA, 2010; Zinkina & Korotayev, 2014). Under conditions of extreme poverty and prolonged conflict as is the case in many parts of SSA, the population growth has been tempered with low life expectancy at birth (the average in SSA being about 55 years in 2012) and a worrying youth bulge as there is a large percentage of unemployed young people in the population (BBC, 2009; World Bank, 2013). In most countries of SSA, at least 50% of the population is below the age of 25 years, and a further 43% of the population are below the age of 15 (UNFPA, 2010; PRB, 2013).

The implication of the rapid demographic change in SSA for the embedded culture of violence profile is that in most volatile conflict-prone and war-affected countries and regions such as South Sudan, Darfur (western Sudan), northern Uganda, Eastern DRC, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Nigeria and, to a lesser extent, post-war Sierra Leone and Liberia, well over half of the population of people in these countries or sub-national regions have virtually lived their entire lives under a highly dysfunctional culture of violence. The rebel war waged by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda lasted for 20 years (1986 – 2006). The liberation war in South Sudan lasted for nearly 40 years (1955 – 1972 and 1983 – 2005) and the country has once more relapsed to armed conflict since December 2013. The civil war in Darfur has been fought since 2003. The civil war in Liberia lasted for 14 years (1989 – 2003). The war in Eastern DRC has carried on since 1996. The political histories of Chad and CAR have been characterized by violent military coups and repeated relapse to armed conflict since independence. Similarly, since the end of the Biafra civil war in 1970, Nigeria’s history has been marred by repeated military coups, prolonged dictatorship, as well as endemic structures of communal violence and militia insurgencies in different sub-national regions leading to a prolonged state of “no war, no peace” in the country (Obi, 209:132). When violence becomes entrenched as a means of conducting and
settling political affairs, it inadvertently robs off on the dominant culture of politics, leaving behind a convoluted culture in which resort to armed conflict becomes an acceptable framework for political action and behaviour (Jackson & Jackson, 1997). This is why it is important that peace education curriculum developers and implementers, researchers and policy practitioners in SSA should aim at enhancing the understanding and deconstructing of the deep-rooted culture of violence in different parts of the region.

References


Francis J. David (2009) “Universities can play a central role in peace building” - See more at: http://www.guninetwork.org/resources/guni.talks/david-francis#sthash.4Q3l0FmV.dpuf


