

# CONFLICT TRENDS

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Cover photo: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at Zam Zam camp outside El Fasher, Sudan. UN Photo/Tim McKulka



# EDITORIAL

BY VASU GOUNDEN

"I think it's a continuity of the system, since the heads are the heads of the old system that was rejected by the population. Moreover, it's empty political programmes, so here we talk about things that are unachievable with our economy, it's like selling dreams to little kids."<sup>1</sup> These are the words of a young Algerian protester who was one of thousands of protesters who marched every Friday for nine months to demand change. The protests forced the long-serving president of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, to rescind a plan to contest for a fifth term before he was eventually forced to resign after 20 years in charge.

Similar street protests forced out the long-serving Sudanese president, Omar al-Bashir, from power early in 2019. In Guinea, since October 2019, around one million people protested in the capital city, Conakry, against the embattled 81-year-old president, Alpha Conde, suspected of wanting to run for a third term. It is now two years since the long-standing president of Zimbabwe, the late Robert Mugabe, was ousted from power by street protests.

It is important for us in Africa to understand what the factors are that drive these street protests, and what the possible outcomes and consequences are. There is no doubt that the root causes of these protests are the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality. These factors are exacerbated by rising food and fuel prices, which are usually the trigger that leads to street protests, which soon turn into political protests.

However, the triple challenges and rising food and fuel prices have been prevalent in Africa for several decades, so why are we now seeing such widespread and frequent protests across Africa? The main factors driving these phenomena are the sheer numbers of people who are now concentrated in urban areas and in possession of tools that give them unprecedented power to mobilise at a massive level in a very short time. Governments are not able to respond as fast, or to respond with minimum force. Consequently, casualties are high, and this has led to a cycle of conflict characterised by months of street protests.

The world, and Africa, is entering a dangerous era – one in which there will be little room to mediate between street protesters and their leaders to find new spaces for

dialogue on building new social compacts that address the triple challenges. We are entering an era of growing authoritarianism in the name of stability. Right-wing leaders around the world, who thrive on exploiting the fears of their populations about a flood of migrants from Africa because of instability, will find allies among leaders in Africa who want to curb legitimate protests, and use the fact that instability will lead to a flood of refugees to other parts of the world. This unholy alliance will have negative consequences for Africa and will roll back the gains made in advancing democracy and human rights.

Chaotic, leaderless and misdirected street protests can be counterproductive and have negative consequences. It is also true that opportunistic forces from within and outside a country can hijack legitimate protests and exploit them for narrow ends. On the other hand, there is no doubt that many countries in Africa are failing to meet the basic needs of their people, and people are taking to the streets and engaging in legitimate protests to demand the basic services that they voted for.

Africa's leaders will not solve the continent's challenges by clamping down on legitimate protests. Africa's challenges need confident and visionary leaders who are willing to put the interests of their people above self, group and political party. Africa needs a new national consciousness that is rooted in a pan-African consciousness. The year 2019 will be recorded as another year in which the people of Africa voted with their feet. Let 2020 be a year in which Africa's leaders lead with their hearts and minds, and turn the dreams of our youth into reality! **A**

**Vasu Gounden is the Founder and Executive Director of ACCORD.**

1 Africanews (2019) 'Young Algerians Call Out Dinosaur Elite Ahead of Divisive Polls', Available at: <<https://www.africanews.com/2019/12/10/young-algerians-call-out-dinosaur-elite-ahead-of-divisive-polls/>> [Accessed 11 December 2019].





# REFLECTING ON THE ROLE OF REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS IN RESOLVING THE POST-COUP CRISIS IN SUDAN

BY CLAYTON HAZVINEI VHUMBUNU

## Introduction

The overthrow of Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir from the presidency of Sudan by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) on 11 April 2019, following several months of protests and civil uprisings by Sudanese citizens, resulted in a prolonged governance and political crisis. Al-Bashir, who was a SAF lieutenant general, came to power in June 1989, through a military *coup d'état* staged against Sadiq al-Mahdi, who was the then-prime minister of Sudan. Al-Bashir had been in

power for almost 30 years, making him one of the longest-serving presidents on the continent. Following his ousting on 11 April 2019, internal political players and stakeholders – mainly the ruling Transitional Military Council (TMC) and a coalition of protesters and opposition groups, led by the

**Above: Omar Hassan al-Bashir was president of Sudan for 30 years.**



UN PHOTO/LAURA JARRIEL



**Abdalla Hamdok was sworn in as the new prime minister of Sudan on 21 August 2019.**

Alliance for Freedom and Change/Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) in Sudan – failed to speedily agree and settle on an effective transitional governance authority.

However, following different forms of interventions from regional and international actors and players, the TMC and FFC finally signed the Political Agreement on Establishing the Structures and Institutions of the Transitional Period between the Transitional Military Council and the Declaration of Freedom and Change Forces, on 17 July 2019. Subsequently, on 17 August 2019, the TMC and FFC signed the Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Transitional Period – widely referred to as the Constitutional Declaration – which replaced the Transitional Constitution of Sudan of 2005. This Constitutional Charter is set to be in force for a 39-month transitional period.

The new prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, was sworn in on 21 August 2019. He appointed his Cabinet of Ministers on 5 September 2019, within the framework of a power-sharing agreement between the military, civilian representatives and protest groups. With a civilian-led government now in place in Sudan, ready to preside over governance in the set transitional period, it is time to reflect on the role of regional

and international interventions in resolving the post-coup crisis in Sudan. This article therefore assesses the role played by external actors and players in resolving the post-coup crisis in Sudan, specifically evaluating the accomplishments and setbacks encountered in assisting the parties to fully agree on transitional governance mechanisms. This reflection will assist in understanding the evolving role of regional and international institutions in African conflicts, and their sustainability and broader implications on the continent. The article focuses on the main influential external actors, which include the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Ethiopia (under the Ethiopian Initiative), the African Union Commission (AUC), the Arab League, the Sudan Troika (of the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Norway) and the United Nations (UN).

### **The Sudan Crisis: Background and Context**

Politically, Sudan has a history and political culture of many coups, having experienced these in 1958, 1969, 1985 and 1989, as well as failed coup attempts in 1961 and 1971.<sup>1</sup> This lack of consistent, orderly and smooth transfer of power in most of Sudan's transitions signals deep-rooted and entrenched governance challenges.

The country has endured long periods of bloody conflicts and war, interrupted by short periods of peace, since attaining political independence in January 1956. In *Sudan: The Elusive Quest for Peace*, Ruth Lyob and Gilbert Khadiagala fittingly make reference to Sudan as "a land where peace always seems to hover on the horizon while numerous destructive wars scar its inhabitants".<sup>2</sup>

Sudan's First Civil War (1955–1972) and the Second Civil War (1983–2005) were both motivated by different political, historical, social and economic grievances. These included the clamour for autonomy by the southerners, driven by disgruntlement over regional imbalances, under-representation, exclusion, inequality, exploitation and marginalisation of southerners, unequal access to scarce resources, misgovernance and the curtailment of freedoms and civil liberties on the basis of regionalism, religion, ethnic groupings and political affiliation.<sup>3</sup> This ultimately led to the secession of South Sudan in July 2011, following an overwhelming affirmative vote through a referendum in southern Sudan in January 2011. Despite the secession, Sudan continued to experience internal latent conflict, with full-blown conflict in Abyei and South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, mainly due to outstanding issues that emanated from the pre-secession agreement – that is, the



REUTERS/MOHAMED NURELDIN ABDALLAH

**Sudanese people celebrate the signing of the Constitutional Declaration by the Transitional Military Council and Sudan's opposition alliance coalition, in Khartoum (August 2019).**





**Sudan was one of the top oil producers in Africa before South Sudan's secession.**

Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005, specifically the Protocol on the Resolution of the Conflict in Abyei Area and the Protocol on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States, both signed on 26 May 2004 by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). On the other hand, Sudan also experienced destructive genocidal conflict in the Darfur region from 2003, involving the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebel groups against the government of Sudan, sparked by tribal disputes over access to land and water. This war led to warrants of arrest for al-Bashir in March 2009 and July 2010 by the International Criminal Court on allegations of crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of genocide.

Economically, Sudan has not managed to deliver consistent and inclusive socio-economic development and growth since independence, despite having huge oil reserves and with the country ranked among the top five largest oil producers in Africa before secession.<sup>4</sup> The country is also rich in iron ore deposits, copper, mica, zinc, chromium ore, silver, tungsten and hydropower. Over and above the destabilising effects of conflict, failure to diversify the economy and implement effective macro-economic management has led to retarded growth and development in Sudan since independence. In addition, United States (US) sanctions on

Sudan, issued under Executive Order 13067 of 3 November 1997<sup>5</sup> and Executive Order 13400 of 26 April 2006,<sup>6</sup> imposed a trade embargo on Sudan and blocked the property of certain people over allegations of supporting international terrorism, destabilising neighbouring governments, human rights violations and threatening the national security and foreign policy of the US. Further, the secession of South Sudan resulted in a loss of oil revenue that accounted for over 50% of government revenue and 95% of its exports; all this was made worse by the 2015/2016 global oil price slump.<sup>7</sup> By 2017, Sudan was afflicted by high inflation of over 55%, trade and financial sanctions, persistent fiscal and external trade deficits, higher energy prices, debt distress and macro-economic instability.<sup>8</sup>

**BY 2017, SUDAN WAS AFFLICTED BY HIGH INFLATION OF OVER 55%, TRADE AND FINANCIAL SANCTIONS, PERSISTENT FISCAL AND EXTERNAL TRADE DEFICITS, HIGHER ENERGY PRICES, DEBT DISTRESS AND MACRO-ECONOMIC INSTABILITY**

Whilst the previous discussion highlights the background to the Sudanese conflict, the immediate cause of the eruption and escalation of the 2018/2019 protests was the rising cost of living, and the trigger was the disorder caused by the tripling of bread prices and an increase in the fuel price on 19 December 2018.<sup>9</sup> These protests started in the town of Atbara and spread to Port Sudan, Dongola and Khartoum, with the protesters ultimately demanding economic transformation, political reforms and the stepping down of al-Bashir. The reaction and response from the government – declaring a state of emergency; dissolving the government and appointing military and intelligence service officers; using excessive force; as well as arresting, incarcerating and torturing protesters – incited more protests. The protests finally led to al-Bashir's ouster by the SAF on 11 April 2019, before he was transferred from house arrest to prison on 17 April 2019 and charged for political killings on 13 May 2019. The TMC, led by Lieutenant General Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf (who had been the country's Minister of Defence since 2015), took over after dissolving Cabinet and Parliament, before Ibn Auf stepped down and was replaced by Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Burhan. Continued protests by citizens since then – organised by the Sudanese Professional Association and other opposition groups calling for a civilian transitional authority – have been brutally suppressed by the TMC security forces and the Rapid

Support Forces (RSF), along with shutting down the internet to disable and disrupt social media protest mobilisation, and with hundreds of people having been injured and killed.<sup>10</sup>

The TMC and the FFC finally reached agreement and signed the Political Agreement on 17 July 2019, and later the Constitutional Declaration on 17 August 2019 – which will both facilitate the sharing of power in the transitional period of three years before elections are conducted. These signings paved the way for the appointment of the Sovereign Council on 21 August 2019, led by General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Burhan, who was also the leader of the TMC. The Sovereign Council is a 11-member joint ruling body that officially dissolved and replaced the TMC. It is made up of five members of the military chosen by the TMC, five civilians chosen by the FFC, and a civilian jointly chosen and agreed on by both the TMC and the FFC, as provided for under Article 10 (2) of the Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Transitional Period.<sup>11</sup> It is the highest authority in Sudan, although it delegates executive powers to the Cabinet of Ministers, led by Hamdok.

### **The Context and Traditional Basis of External Intervention in Conflict**

Before exploring the role of external players in managing the post-coup crisis in Sudan, it is necessary to understand the context and basis upon which external actors get



REUTERS/MOHAMED NURELDIN ABDALLAH

**Sudanese demonstrators participate in anti-government protests in Khartoum (17 January 2019).**





**The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Council of Ministers make a commitment to bring all actors in the Sudan together for the resolution of their differences and to ensure an all-inclusive, Sudanese-led process and outcome that remedies the situation in the Sudan (19 June 2019).**

involved in the management and resolution of conflicts within their region. External players are empowered by various aspects of international law to intervene in conflicts.

One of the African Union's (AU) principle objectives, provided under Article 3 (f), is to "promote peace, security, and stability on the continent".<sup>12</sup> The AU is empowered to intervene in any member state on the strength of Article 4 (h) of the Constitutive Act of the continental body, which provides "the right of the Union 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".<sup>13</sup> Thus, interventions to promote peace, security and stability take different forms, such as diplomatic efforts, facilitating negotiations, mediation, dispute resolution or exerting political pressure, and so on. However, it is a sacrosanct principle that the sovereignty of member states is respected.

Within the context of Sudan, IGAD is a key regional organisation. In its preamble, the Agreement Establishing the IGAD affirms the desire by member states to promote

"peace, security and stability, and eliminate the sources of conflict as well as prevent and resolve conflicts in the region".<sup>14</sup> IGAD member states commit to the peaceful settlement of interstate and intrastate conflicts through dialogue, as well as the maintenance of regional peace, stability and security. In preventing, managing and resolving conflicts at the regional level, regional organisations such as IGAD are guided by Chapter VIII on Regional Arrangements of the UN Charter of 1945 as the enabling law. Article 51 of the Charter encourages regional organisations to engage in pacific settlement of local disputes, either on the initiative of the states concerned or by reference from the UN Security Council.<sup>15</sup> Regional organisations thus have interests even in intrastate conflicts, as these may spill beyond borders and threaten regional – and, consequently, international – peace, security and stability.

There has been much debate in international law about the norms governing the basis of intervention in intrastate conflicts by states in their individual capacity. However, this intervention is often based on the Responsibility to

Protect (R2P) obligation – that individual states and the international community must take appropriate action in a timely and decisive manner in accordance with the UN Charter if there are situations where populations are at risk of crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing. This principle emanated from the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty Report of 2001 and was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2005.<sup>16</sup> It should be stated that the R2P principle is usually argued to be at odds with the principle of state sovereignty.

### **The Role of Regional and International Actors in Managing the Post-coup Crisis in Sudan**

The most influential external actors in Sudan were IGAD, Ethiopia (under the Ethiopian Initiative), the AUC, the Arab League, the Sudan Troika and the UN. Negotiations between the TMC and the FFC were complicated by a lack of compromise on both sides, an impasse over the proposed transitional arrangements and composition of leadership of the Sovereign Council, and repeated interruptions due to violence and killings directed at protestors in Khartoum and other cities that clamoured for civilian rule.

#### ***Inter-Governmental Authority on Development***

Following the ouster of al-Bashir from the presidency of Sudan on 11 April 2019, as citizens protested against the imposition of military rule, the IGAD Council of Ministers made a commitment, at the regional bloc's 68<sup>th</sup> Extra-Ordinary Session on 19 June 2019, to "bring all actors in the Sudan together for the resolution of their differences and to ensure an all-inclusive, Sudanese-led process and outcome that remedies the situation in the Sudan".<sup>17</sup> At the same meeting, IGAD made a decision to "assume a leading role to coordinate all efforts to bring sustainable peace in Sudan", as well as to "coordinate its efforts with the Special Advisor of the Chairperson of the AUC",<sup>18</sup> consistent with the subsidiarity principle to ensure coherence and synergy, whilst calling on the international community to support the IGAD initiative.

In addition to coordinating the efforts of the AUC Special Envoy to Sudan, IGAD also contributed to addressing the Sudanese crisis by condemning violent acts of the TMC towards protesters, especially the 87 people reportedly killed and 168 wounded by security forces on 3 June 2019.<sup>19</sup> In the process, IGAD played the lobbying and advocacy role, urging "all actors" in Sudan to "refrain from any act of violence" whilst working towards a lasting solution for an inclusive transitional government. IGAD also made a statement against interference by foreign players in the Sudan crisis.<sup>20</sup>

#### ***The African Union***

The AU played a more visible and impactful role in addressing the post-coup crisis in Sudan. One of the boldest and most decisive actions, taken on 6 June 2019 by the AU, was to suspend Sudan from participating in all AU activities. This was a decision of the AU Peace and Security Council



**The African Union chairperson, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt, convened a Consultative Summit of the Regional Partners of The Sudan on 23 April 2019.**

(PSC) at the 854<sup>th</sup> Meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in line with the AU Constitutive Act and African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, specifically Article 7 (1) (g) of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, which provides that the PSC may "institute sanctions whenever an unconstitutional change of Government takes place in a Member State, as provided for in the Lomé Declaration".<sup>21</sup> The readmission condition was that Sudan needed to establish a civilian-led transitional authority.

Prior to this decision, the AU visited Sudan to assess the situation and consult with key stakeholders to identify a lasting solution to the crisis. For example, the chairperson of the AUC, Moussa Faki Mahamat, visited Khartoum on 20–21 April 2019 and had consultations with the TMC, political

**ONE OF THE BOLDEST AND MOST DECISIVE ACTIONS, TAKEN ON 6 JUNE 2019 BY THE AU, WAS TO SUSPEND SUDAN FROM PARTICIPATING IN ALL AU ACTIVITIES**



**African Union mediator, Mohamed El Hacem Lebatt signs the Constitutional Declaration in Khartoum (4 August 2019).**

parties, civil society organisations, the UN, European Union (EU), bilateral partners, African diplomatic corps and other members of the international community.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this, the AU chairperson, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt, convened a Consultative Summit of the Regional Partners of The Sudan on 23 April 2019. This was attended by 12 member states (Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan and Uganda) to contribute to a solution to the post-coup crisis in Sudan.<sup>23</sup>

The AUC also deployed Mohamed El Hacem Lebatt (principal strategic advisor to the AUC chairperson) on 1 May 2019 as the AU Special Envoy leading the AUC facilitation team, with the mandate to facilitate and technically support the negotiations and dialogue among the Sudanese stakeholders to reach a common agreement that would pave the way for a consensual and civilian-led transition.<sup>24</sup> Other than facilitating negotiations, the AU Special Envoy assisted in exerting pressure on the parties to move speedily during periods of sporadic violence in June–July 2019; and also lobbied, through the AU PSC,<sup>25</sup> for the launch of transparent investigations into the reported killing of protesters in June–July 2019 by RSF forces. In addition, just as was the case with IGAD, the AU added its voice to caution “foreign

actors to refrain from interference” and instead support the Sudanese-led and -owned peace process.<sup>26</sup>

It is through these marathon AU-mediated negotiations, complemented by Ethiopia, that the TMC and the FFC finally signed the Political Agreement on Establishing the Structures and Institutions of the Transitional Period between the Transitional Military Council and the Declaration of Freedom and Change Forces on 17 July 2019, as well as the Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Transitional Period on 17 August 2019.

## OTHER THAN FACILITATING NEGOTIATIONS, THE AU SPECIAL ENVOY ASSISTED IN EXERTING PRESSURE ON THE PARTIES TO MOVE SPEEDILY DURING PERIODS OF SPORADIC VIOLENCE IN JUNE–JULY 2019

### ***The Ethiopian Initiative***

Ethiopia’s involvement in the Sudanese crisis involved the country’s prime minister and his personal envoy. First, the prime minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, met Lieutenant



General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Burhan and members of the FFC in Khartoum on 7 July 2019 in an effort to foster dialogue. Later, a special envoy of the Ethiopian prime minister for Sudan, Ambassador Mohamoud Dirir, was dispatched to be part of the AU-brokered negotiations. However, there were concerns that the Ethiopian Initiative and the AU-led mediation were initially not well coordinated and synergised<sup>27</sup> – to the extent that at one point during the course of the negotiations, the TMC expressed sharp criticism and displeasure against the approach, in favour of a joint initiative.<sup>28</sup> However, this was later addressed as the negotiations proceeded, with the AU and Ethiopia eventually combining their efforts and proposals.

### **The Arab League**

Given that Sudan is a member of the 22-member Arab League – a regional organisation formed in March 1945 by Arab states from the Middle East, North Africa and Horn of Africa – there were efforts from the Arab League meant to contribute to the peace process. On 16 June 2019, the Secretary General of the Arab League, Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, held talks with the TMC's Burhan and FFC leaders in Khartoum, adding pressure for a civil government. However, the Arab League seemed not to have any tangible intervention or initiative to support negotiations other than encouragement for dialogue. Before the TMC-FFC

negotiations resumed, an Arab League initiative led al-Sisi to meet the deputy head of the TMC, Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, on 29 July 2019 in Cairo, to discuss the security situation in Sudan. This led to insinuations that the Arab League favoured the TMC over the FFC. In August 2019, the Arab League issued a statement welcoming the signing of the Constitutional Declaration by the TMC and the FFC, reiterating its support of the transitional government.<sup>29</sup>

### **The United Nations, European Union and the Sudan Troika**

The AU, as the leading facilitator of dialogue in Sudan, commended the collaboration of the UN, EU and the Troika of the USA, United Kingdom (UK) and Norway for the support they rendered to the mediation process.<sup>30</sup> Since the beginning of the crisis in December 2018, the Troika issued several statements condemning the abuse of human rights and curtailment of freedoms, as well as the use of violence against peaceful protesters, whilst declaring its willingness to support dialogue and political and economic transition in Sudan.

The Troika also convened several meetings, attended by different stakeholders, to discuss the Sudanese crisis. For example, on 18 May 2019 and 21 June 2019, the Troika met in Washington DC and Berlin to discuss the post-coup crisis in Sudan. These meetings were attended by the Troika states, the EU, the AU, Germany, France, the United Arab



**A high-level event on Sudan was held at the United Nations (UN) headquarters during the general debate of the General Assembly's seventy-fourth session and included, Moussa Faki Mahamat (left), chairperson of the African Union Commission, Abdalla Hamdok (center), prime minister of Sudan, and the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres (right) – 27 September 2019.**

UN PHOTO/KIM HAUGHTON

Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Following the signing of the Constitutional Declaration, the Troika affirmed its commitment to support transitional processes in Sudan as well as economic, legal and constitutional reforms during the transitional period.<sup>31</sup> By and large, the Troika has played a lobbying and advocacy role, using its historical influence in Sudanese politics.

On the other hand, the UN has been monitoring and assessing the situation in Sudan since the outbreak of demonstrations in December 2018, and engaged in preventive diplomacy to prevent the crisis from escalating. As such, it has issued statements strongly condemning the use of violence, rape, intimidation and excessive force by the TMC, and reminded the TMC of its responsibility to ensure the safety and security of citizens as well as protection of people's freedoms, whilst also urging the protestors to exercise restraint.<sup>32</sup> From the onset, the UN declared its willingness to support peaceful resolution of the conflict, inclusive dialogue and peaceful transition. During the course of negotiations, the UN encouraged the parties to agree on a settlement, and also pledged to support the transition process in Sudan after the signing of the Political Agreement and Constitutional Declaration, through legal, political and institutional reforms.<sup>33</sup>

### **Outcome of Interventions: Accomplishments and Setbacks**

The various regional and international actors – namely IGAD, Ethiopia, the AUC, the Arab League, the Sudan Troika and the UN – contributed in different ways to address the Sudan crisis. IGAD, Ethiopia and the AUC were very active through facilitative mediation, whilst the other players were engaged more in preventive diplomacy to prevent the escalation of the crisis, as well as shuttle diplomacy to persuade the TMC and the FFC to engage in dialogue and reach a compromise agreement. The main setback was that the actors were not well coordinated, with each actor involved in its own initiative. However, IGAD, Ethiopia and the AUC ultimately engaged in a coordinated joint initiative. The major setbacks were the failure by the two parties in Khartoum to timeously reach a compromise, which was worsened by the heavy-handedness of the RSF in dealing with protestors, thus delaying negotiations. There were a few major accomplishments:

1. the restoration of relative peace and stability;
2. the success of the mediators in facilitating the signing of the Political Agreement and Constitutional Declaration;
3. the readmission of Sudan into the AU;
4. the ultimate formation of a transitional government; and
5. the regaining of confidence in the transitional government by the international community.

### **Conclusion and Way Forward**

There is no dispute that the role of regional and international actors is effective in addressing conflicts in Sudan and in the subregion. Although it is understandable

that the various actors are motivated by different geostrategic, political and sometimes economic interests in their interventions, what is recommended is more cohesion and coordination of efforts in addressing conflicts in Africa. As the key player in regional conflict resolution and management, the AUC needs to have a clear template for being the interface between regional organisations to avoid uncoordinated and disjointed interventions.

Moving forward, it is also recommended that regional and international actors address the key priorities of the post-crisis phase in their support of the Sudanese Transitional Government by addressing the root causes of the crisis. These actors should also address the need for economic stabilisation, recovery and improving social service delivery; institute proceedings to investigate human rights abuses committed during the post-coup crisis; build strong and resilient institutions of governance; reform state institutions, including the security sector; and support initiatives to build sustainable peace across the country, including Darfur, especially at a time when the country is ranked as the eighth most fragile state in the world.<sup>34</sup> Having said this, the success and effective delivery of the Sudanese Transitional Government is dependent upon the willingness of South Sudanese to work together harmoniously and constructively engage in the development of their own country. More importantly, the various actors that assisted in different ways to resolve the post-coup crisis in Sudan need to continue to invest efforts towards ensuring that the transitional government delivers its functions and mandate effectively. The Sudanese case presents vital and instructive lessons on how to facilitate and improve the efficacy of regional and international interventions during times of crisis and conflicts in Africa. **A**

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# HEALING THE WOUNDS OF THE PAST: PEACEBUILDING PROSPECTS FOR ZIMBABWE

BY **DARLINGTON TSHUMA**



## Introduction

This article is an attempt to contextualise Zimbabwe's complex history of political violence and conflict while providing an analysis of reconciliation, peacebuilding and nation-building attempts since 1980. The article contends that prospects for successful peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction in any society hinge on the development of a specific set of skills to attend to the various challenges and opportunities presented by conflict and violence. In Zimbabwe, the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) represents a first major attempt in this regard. The NPRC is an attempt to

resolve past violent conflicts while building local capacities to guarantee a peaceful and harmonious future for all. In Zimbabwe, while conflicts today find expression in different interconnected layers, ranging from a household level (domestic violence) to broader social-level land conflicts, the majority of conflicts remain deeply rooted in disputes over national power (politics) and socio-economic hardships. In attempting to provide analyses of the crises in Zimbabwe, this author remains aware that the crises are complex and multidimensional. Because of this limitation, this article only explores issues that have a bearing on the healing, reconciliation and nation-building process in Zimbabwe.

### Insights into Violence and Conflict in Zimbabwe

The history of present-day Zimbabwe has been characterised by recurring cycles of violence and human rights abuses, often on a very large scale. These include the liberation struggle against white minority rule, the Gukurahundi genocide<sup>1</sup> of the 1980s, the chaotic and violent land redistribution programme, the violent and insensitive “urban clean-up” campaign of 2005 (Operation Murambatsvina), and large displacements associated with electoral violence in 2000, 2002 and 2008. As a result of these recurring episodes of violence and conflict in Zimbabwe, it is likely that almost everyone knows someone who is either a victim, survivor, perpetrator or enabler of this brutal legacy of violence and impunity. To understand this informal economy of violence, this author reflects on the work of notable historians and academics, among them Ndlovu-Gatsheni<sup>2</sup> – a celebrated historian and authority on contemporary Zimbabwean history.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues<sup>3</sup> that violence forms a significant component of Zimbabwe’s past and contemporary history. He contends that Zimbabwe’s transition from a colony to a sovereign nation and from a promising post-independent state into unprecedented crisis and chaos post-2000 is largely the result of violence, its memory and impunity.

He locates what he calls a “culture of violence” within three undemocratic episodes and historical processes that produced Zimbabwe. First was the country’s patriarchal and often violent pre-colonial history (pre-1890), where political cultures and practices were influenced and permeated by ideologies of heredity and kinship rather than modern-day competitive politics. Second was a violent colonial project (1890–1980), which imposed an undemocratic system based on white supremacy, patriarchy and violent authoritarianism. This system of governance was racist and patriarchal, as it excluded blacks and women from participating in the country’s political processes. It also discriminated against minority groups. Third was the rise of African nationalism (approximately 1960–1979), which inspired violent and armed military resistance across southern Africa. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues<sup>4</sup> that like its predecessor, this period was characterised by authoritarianism, commandism and the suppression of dissent that privileged violent problem-solving over dialogue and national consensus.

Machakanja<sup>5</sup> notes that since the violent invasion of precolonial kingdoms by Cecil John Rhodes’ British South African Company (BSAC) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent colonisation of southern Rhodesia by Britain, the history of Zimbabwe has remained steeped in



STR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

**A house is destroyed in Chitungwiza during Robert Mugabe’s government clean-up campaign (17 June 2005).**



**Violent problem-solving has often been utilised and privileged as a method of addressing political and social differences in Zimbabwe.**

violent and intractable conflict. Benyera<sup>6</sup> goes further to describe Zimbabwe as a “chronically violent state” before colonialism, during colonialism and after independence. The author adds that Zimbabwe has routinely experienced brief spells of progress and then longer and often intractable cycles of challenges that could easily be interpreted as its dominant narrative. For example, the independence euphoria in 1980 was interrupted by large-scale political violence and politicide in Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands – the Gukurahundi genocide, which lasted five years (1982–1987) and which eventually ended with the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987. Since the formation of the country’s first mass political opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in September 1999, Zimbabwe has remained trapped in constant and perpetual cycles of conflict and violence, exacerbated by disputed and inconclusive electoral contests.

Because violent problem-solving has often been utilised and privileged as a method for addressing political and social differences since colonial times, Zimbabwe today remains a fractured and broken society. Social trust has been eroded, leaving communities divided, while society itself has become dysfunctional. Torture, harassment, threats and intimidation of dissenting voices have become familiar weapons of choice deployed by successive administrations to quell dissent and

the opposition.<sup>7</sup> While these undemocratic measures have ensured that incumbent administrations retained power at all costs, over time the social costs have far outweighed the political gains. This has not been helped by the fact that until quite recently – with the establishment of the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI) – the NPRC’s prospects of achieving sustainable peace and stability in Zimbabwe remained an elusive challenge.

Scholars like Ndlovu-Gatsheni<sup>8</sup> and Chiweshe<sup>9</sup> argue that this was partly due to the lack of comprehensive and holistic healing and reconciliation approaches that should have looked into issues of past human rights violations, violence and conflict to facilitate truth-telling, national healing and reconciliation as important building blocks for nation-building. Today, the majority of conflicts and disagreements remain deeply rooted in disputes over national power (politics) and socio-economic hardships. This is, in part, because colonial and post-colonial struggles for access to, and control and management of, political power entrenched a culture of political intolerance, violence and violent problem-solving. Sachikonye argues<sup>10</sup> that since independence, the ruling party – the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) – has deployed muscular methods of contesting power, including the active deployment of violence, intimidation and the harassment of



opposition members and activists. The cumulative events of the past century have raised concerns about the country's dire need for political and social transformation.

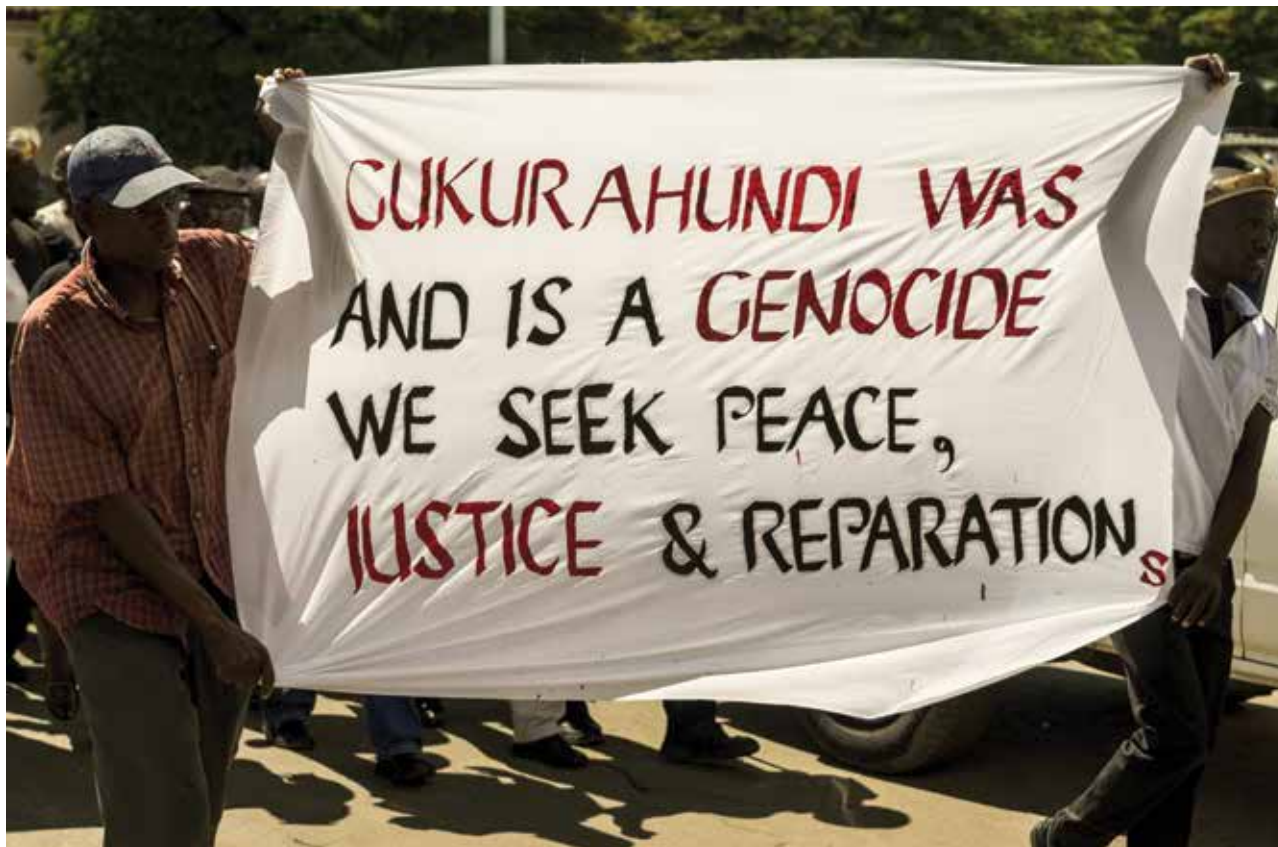
#### **Attempts at Healing and Reconciliation Since 1980**

Zimbabwe's attempts at national healing and reconciliation can be categorised into three distinct phases: the transitional period leading to independence in 1980; the Unity Accord of 1987; and the post-2008 period, following an inconclusive vote pitting former president Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai – Zimbabwean prime minister from 2009 to 2013, president of the Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai (MDC-T) and a key opposition figure to Mugabe. The common thread across all these peace attempts is that they failed to establish the necessary pre-conditions for social cohesion, national healing and reconciliation.

Zimbabwe's first attempt at reconciling and healing a deeply divided and hurting society was through a national reconciliation policy announced by Mugabe immediately after the attainment of political independence in 1980, in his capacity as the country's first black prime minister. The policy involved the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) comprising liberation struggle rivalries – the Patriotic Front (PF) on one hand, and Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front (RF)

on the other. A new national army, christened the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), was born out of this arrangement. However, the shortcomings of this elite arrangement later plunged Zimbabwe into deep politico-ethnic strife that engulfed large parts of south-western Zimbabwe, where over 20 000 supporters of the Patriotic Front – Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU)<sup>11</sup> and innocent civilians were massacred by Mugabe's Gukurahundi forces between 1982 and 1987.

The second attempt at reconciliation was the signing of the Unity Accord between ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU in December 1987, following the Gukurahundi ethnic cleansing in predominantly Ndebele-speaking communities. The genocide was perpetrated by Mugabe's Fifth Brigade, resulting in thousands of deaths, multiple cases of human rights abuse and large-scale population displacement. No concerted efforts were made to seek justice for the thousands of people whose lives and livelihoods were destroyed as a result of the violence. Instead, perpetrators were granted amnesty by Mugabe, in the process trivialising the suffering of victims and survivors. Mugabe would later describe the political killings as constituting a "moment of madness".



ZINWANGE AUNTONY/AP VIA GETTY IMAGES

**No concerted efforts were made to administer justice for the thousands of people whose lives and livelihoods were destroyed as a result of the Gukurahundi massacre.**



**The fierce nature of the June 2008 presidential run-off election, and the violence unleashed on his supporters, forced opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, to pull out of the electoral contest.**

The third and last attempt at reconciliation and nation-building followed the violent and inconclusive presidential run-off election in June 2008. The fierce nature of the election and the violence unleashed on his supporters forced opposition leader Tsvangirai to pull out of the electoral contest. International condemnation forced Mugabe to reconcile with Tsvangirai through a mediation process facilitated by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), with the support of the African Union (AU). Following lengthy negotiations, in September 2008, the three political parties represented in Zimbabwe's parliament signed a Global Political Agreement (GPA), which provided for the formation of Zimbabwe's third GNU since independence. Both SADC and the AU became guarantors of this agreement. The GNU lasted five years – between February 2009 and July 2013 – and came to an end following

**THE MDC AND OTHER PRO-DEMOCRACY PARTIES HAVE BEEN RESOLUTE IN THEIR DESIRE TO HAVE THE MEDIATION PROCESS LED BY NEUTRAL AND CREDIBLE MEDIATORS**

yet another disputed vote, in which the opposition MDC-T lost to ZANU-PF. Mugabe won by over 60%.

At present, the country is battling a devastating economic and political crisis, since a widely disputed election in July 2018 that pitted ZANU-PF's Emmerson Mnangagwa against Nelson Chamisa – leader of the opposition (MDC-A) – and which was won by Mnangagwa. Some civilians were gunned down by the military in Harare a day after the election. The political stalemate that followed the election saw civil society leaders – particularly the church, under the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) – make numerous overtures to bring the main disputants to dialogue, with the view of stopping a potentially catastrophic situation. Disappointingly, these pre-emptive and preventive efforts have not yielded tangible results as yet. The NPRC also attempted to initiate its own national dialogue, but the process was abruptly abandoned when Mnangagwa's government initiated its own negotiating platform – the Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD) – and appointed the NPRC chairperson, retired Justice Selo Nare, to oversee POLAD processes. This move riled opposition parties, the MDC-A included, which argued that Mnangagwa lacked the legitimacy to convene and mediate any national dialogue process. The MDC and other pro-democracy parties have been resolute in their desire to have the mediation process led by neutral and credible mediators. Consequently, the process has stalled – and with



**Emmerson Mnangagwa signed the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) Bill into law on 5 January 2018.**

disagreements over the content and nature of dialogue, including who should convene it, political polarisation remains on a rise and threatens prospects for economic revival and political normalcy. With no political solution in sight, the majority of Zimbabweans face a grim future.

#### **Peacebuilding Prospects in Zimbabwe: An Achievable Goal?**

As has been alluded to previously, nation-building and peacebuilding attempts have faced substantial challenges since 1980. However, the signing of the NPRC Bill into law by Mnangagwa on 5 January 2018 created optimism. In 2018 alone, the NPRC conducted community outreach in the country's 10 provinces, and also implemented a range of peace campaigns in the period leading to the "harmonised elections"<sup>12</sup> in July 2018. Consequently, the campaign period in 2018 was one of the most peaceful in decades. With technical and financial support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the NPRC instituted a number of peacebuilding programmes and campaigns across the country. In 2018, the NPRC also partnered with local universities to institutionalise its work through a specialised internship programme, specifically designed for students pursuing studies in peace and conflict. This programme was

designed to strengthen the nexus between policy, practice and theory. This is crucial, given that prospects for successful peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction in any context hinge on the development of a set of skills to attend to the various challenges and opportunities presented by conflict. According to the National Transition Justice Working Group of Zimbabwe (NTJWZ)<sup>13</sup> the NPRC's functions, as spelt out in Section 525 of the Zimbabwean Constitution, are as follows:

- ensure post-conflict justice, healing and reconciliation;
- develop and implement programmes to provide natural healing, unity and cohesion and the peaceful restoration and resolution of disputes;
- encourage people to tell the truth about the past and facilitate the making of amends and the provision of justice;
- develop procedures and institutions to facilitate dialogue between political parties, communities and other groups; and finally
- take appropriate action on complaints received from the public.

Unlike the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, the NPRC does not investigate past human rights violations. This approach has its own merits





**Women and girls often disproportionately bear the brunt of violence and conflict.**

and disadvantages (as addressed in a separate article<sup>14</sup>). However, what remains problematic is the NPRC's gender programming bias, which is curious given that women and girls often disproportionately bear the brunt of violence and conflict, be it at household or community level. For example, Shaba<sup>15</sup> notes that women were disproportionately affected in the violence leading to the June 2008 presidential run-off. Equally important were the harrowing testimonies by a group of women about the Gukurahundi atrocities during one of the NPRC's outreach meetings in rural Kezi, Matabeleland South.<sup>16</sup> The testimonies attested to the different impact the genocide had on women and men, boys and girls. In spite of this, the NPRC has failed to provide a gendered analysis of conflict, violence and past human rights violations in Zimbabwe. A gendered analysis would have spelt out how women and men, boys and girls, and sexual minorities experienced violence and conflict. This is crucial because the intersection of these different identity factors can subsequently affect an individual's agency and power, with various factors augmenting vulnerabilities. It is equally important given the role women play as community-builders and protectors – although oftentimes their efforts are simply neglected in mainstream peacebuilding discourses. It is also precisely because of their identity as cultural custodians and community-builders that women and girls are often targeted in ways directly linked to their gender and sexuality. In Zimbabwe, sexual violence became

a means of undermining the strength of the opposition, and to annihilate communities opposed to ZANU-PF.<sup>17</sup> Given this context, it is prudent for the NPRC to engage such issues, taking care to analyse the gendered impact of conflict and violence on both victims and perpetrators.

Without revisiting some of its programming flaws, it is difficult to imagine how the NPRC could challenge the patriarchal status quo, which often promotes hyper-masculinities that perpetuate the abuse of women in conflict situations. To Hodzi,<sup>18</sup> the approach adopted by ONHRI – and, after it, the NPRC – demonstrates a deep-seated masculinisation of Zimbabwean politics and justice. However, much can still be done to improve the programming of the NPRC. For example, the NPRC can create gender-neutral spaces for victims who indicate their willingness to testify about sexual violence, rape or other forms of violence that they encountered during conflict, which cannot ordinarily be spoken about in public gatherings. This is important given the justice system's history of trivialising sexual violence.

The three major defining moments in the country's history – the Lancaster House Agreement (1979), the Unity Accord (1987) and, more recently, the GPA (2008) – were largely shaped by men embedded in patriarchal structures, with men assuming most positions of authority and women's contributions receiving limited to no attention.<sup>19</sup> Due to their exclusivity, these peace attempts failed to build lasting peace. Research demonstrates that peace negotiations

are more likely to be successful if they are inclusive. Strengthening the role of women in peacebuilding and reducing the impact of violence and conflict on the lives of women and girls requires a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of gender norms, gender identities and the gendered experiences of both conflict and peace.

As pointed out earlier, the NPRC aims to build a united and cohesive society in which citizens are free to participate in the governance and development of Zimbabwe. If this is the broader aim, how then does the NPRC seek to evaluate its successes against its shortcomings so far? Will the NPRC, like the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) in Rwanda, develop a mechanism to take stock of its work to date? Rwanda's Reconciliation Barometer (RRB) has helped NURC to identify existing gaps that require urgent attention. For example, the RRB found that genocide ideology and ethnic stereotypes remain a challenge for unity and reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> A similar tool may benefit the NPRC's work, particularly given the high level of mistrust between the state and the general populace – trust is an important currency for healing and genuine reconciliation. It may also be used to assess the contribution and involvement of women and minority groups in the peacebuilding process.

## Conclusion

It is clear that healing is not just about the past, but about how the past can affect both the present and the future. It is also clear that mechanisms used historically as vehicles for justice and reconciliation – such as amnesties and pardons, clemencies and commissions of inquiry – have failed to resolve Zimbabwe's complex history of conflict and violence. What is needed are practical healing programmes based on trust, and a genuine desire to resolve past transgressions as a society. The issues raised in this article are not an attempt to discredit the NPRC, but to help broaden its focus and sharpen its programming. Finally, and most importantly, healing and reconciliation cannot be left to the NPRC alone – everyone has to play their part, dutifully and with sincerity. All Zimbabweans must resolve to bequeath to future generations a peaceful, violent-free and prosperous society. **A**

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## Endnotes

1 *Gukurahundi* ("rains that wash the chaff before the early spring rains") is a Shona name given to the massacres that occurred in Matabeleland and parts of Midlands provinces between 1982 and 1987. In 2010, Genocide Watch classified the massacres as a genocide, putting to rest debates on whether the indiscriminate political killings amounted to genocide or not.

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# ETHNIC CONFLICT UNDER ETHNIC FEDERALISM: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

BY **BIRUK SHEWADEG**

## **Introduction**

Ethiopia adopted ethnic federalism and restructured the country's regions along ethnic lines after the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power, overthrowing the military junta in 1991. The regime transformed the hitherto highly centralised state into a federal order and redefined citizenship, politics and identity on ethnic grounds.<sup>1</sup> The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia also states that the federal structure will base itself on an ethno-linguistic divide. Hence, ethnic federalism in Ethiopia inextricably links identity and territory.

The regime announced its objective to establish an ethnically egalitarian nation-state with the redressing of past injustices. The introduction of ethnic federalism was

supposed to be the panacea to solving Ethiopia's perennial "nationalities question" generated by the flawed nation-building process of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Asnake<sup>2</sup> states that the main goals of federal restructuring in Ethiopia were to provide self-determination rights to the ethnic groups of the country, including secession, and also to end ethno-secessionist wars. The presumption that granting Ethiopia's ethnic groups the right to self-determination would lead to peace and provide a new basis for the unity of the country was the reason behind the federal restructuring of the country since 1991. In the same vein, Jalata<sup>3</sup>

**Above: Ethnic federalism in Ethiopia inextricably links identity and territory.**





contended that the regime favoured federal restructuring to respond properly to historical, socio-economic and political challenges, with an emphasis on addressing the historical national identity issues and injustices.

Ethnic federalism is considered by its supporters as the cure-all for holding multi-ethnic Ethiopia together, but it is criticised by others as a dangerous concept that will eventually tear apart the country. Nationalists consider the federal policy as a deliberate ploy to undermine national identity and a deliberate step backwards from the nation-building project. Some understand ethnic federalism to be a malicious Tigrayan People Liberation Front (TPLF) tactic to plant divisions among ethnic groups, to the resultant effect of facilitating rule by the Tigrayan minority. The political system divides rather than unites people by creating mutual suspicion and instituted ethnic dynamics that could easily spiral out of control.

What factors compelled the post-1991 regime to construct multi-ethnic federalism? According to Alem,<sup>4</sup>

it was a consequence of political necessity and ideological orientation. The conception of the Ethiopian nation by the new leadership – that is, the post-1991 regime – remained strongly influenced by the ideological backgrounds of the incumbents – being the “national oppression thesis”<sup>5</sup> inherited from the 1960s and 1970s. As the leadership incumbents were actors in the student movement that espoused the “nationalities question”, together with the land issue, they felt compelled to redefine Ethiopian statehood, favouring ethnic identity and retaining the territorial integrity of the country. To assess Ethiopia’s ethnic federalism, it is essential to first understand what federalism itself is.

### Theorising Federalism

Etymologically, the term “federalism” originated from the Latin term *foedus*, meaning “covenant”.<sup>6</sup> It refers to the sharing of power among autonomous units, and is considered to advocate the values of shared rule and self-rule and to give regions some authority of their own. Federalism



**The longest-serving federal political system in the world is in the United States of America (1789).**

is a system of government entailing a division of power between one common and several sub-authorities, each of which acts directly through its own administrative agencies. Riker<sup>7</sup> notes that federalism is a state in which “two levels of government rule the same land and people; each level has at least one area of action in which it is autonomous; there is some [constitutional] guarantee... of the autonomy of each government in its own sphere”.

Federalism, at its bare minimum, demands the existence of at least two tiers of government that are autonomous in their own areas of competence. This is complex, as it introduces a range of issues relating to diversity, unity, interdependence, cooperation and conflicts.

The rationale to opt for a unitary, federal or hybrid governance system, in one way or another, is to sustain territorial integrity and create national consensus. The aftermath of the Second World War witnessed the deliberation of federalism as a useful tool of state and/or nation-building projects. Thus, a number of countries in Africa and Asia espoused this system in the post-independence period as a way of catering for contentious claims for autonomy within their territories.

The longest-serving federal political systems in the world are found in the United States of America (1789), Switzerland (1848), Canada (1867) and Australia (1901).<sup>8</sup> Despite the success of federalism in these countries, there are many

other cases where federalism failed. These include countries in Eastern Europe, such as the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and other Third World countries. Advocates of federalism in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Duchacek,<sup>9</sup> equated federalism with democracy. Duchacek claimed that “democracy and federalism are always found together [and that] federalism is a territorial dimension of democracy”. However, the view that claims an inextricable linkage between democracy and federalism appears erroneous when considering the empirical experience of the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and the current Ethiopia. These countries are lower in democratisation rankings.

According to Stephan,<sup>10</sup> federalism can be achieved in two ways: “coming-together” and “holding-together” federations.” The first one occurs when sovereign states agree to form a federation voluntarily for reasons of security, government efficiency and so on. The second emerges when two or more existing sovereign states assent to found a federal system for purposes of governmental efficiency, economic development and security. Such federations can advance economic growth via a removal of barriers for trade and the promotion of peace. Holding-together federalism mostly emerges after consensual parliamentary decisions to maintain a unitary state by establishing a multi-ethnic federal system largely to avoid or settle ethnic, regional and other types of group conflict. This type of federation involves



**Anti-colonial leaders in Africa, such as, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, campaigned against federalism.**

a division of the polity into different sub-units, with each having its own sovereignty with respect to some policies. It stands opposite to coming-together federalism, in which sovereign states come together to create a common central government by surrendering a portion of their sovereignty. It is often considered as a political approach employed to save the collapse of a unitary state and to manage ethnic divisions.

“Putting together” is a third variant that Stephan<sup>11</sup> maintains as federalism, and this reflects the experience of Ethiopia. This refers to a union that comes together through coercion or deceitful inclusion of various units by the organised elite. The former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) is a typical example of such ethnic groups having the right of self-governance. However, as Keller<sup>12</sup> argues, Ethiopia changed its course by putting together a type of federalism where the political sphere became ever more centralised by the TPLF-led federal government.

### **Federalism in Africa**

Federalism in Africa is associated with the colonial enterprise of “divide and rule”. Britain tried to introduce federalism in some of its colonies in Africa. Perceiving it as the furtherance of divide and rule in another form, however, anti-colonial leaders strongly resisted this British attempt. This propelled important personalities of the anti-colonial struggle, such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, to campaign against federalism. After independence, the new African rulers opted for unitary systems of government.

In the African context, Osaghae<sup>13</sup> contends that federalism is still necessary to “manage the problems emanating from diversity such as inequitable social and political relations, and unequal development of groups”. Substantiating Osaghae’s point, Kimenyi<sup>14</sup> states that “since ethnic groups associate with particular territories, African States are naturally suited for the establishment of federal systems of government”. In the same vein, Horowitz<sup>15</sup> considers federalism as an indispensable device to accommodate differences in multicultural states. Unfortunately, as Agbu<sup>16</sup> points out, despite the need for federalism in Africa, “federalism has had a poor run in countries where it has been applied.”

### **THE NEW RULERS OF POST-COLONIAL AFRICA CONSIDERED THAT FEDERALISM MAY BE A CRISIS ESCALATOR RATHER THAN A CRISIS REDUCER**

Most countries in contemporary Africa are unitarists, with political power vested in the central government, and political leaders are unwilling to entertain federalism, fearing that federalism reinforces tribalism. The new rulers of post-colonial Africa considered that federalism may be a crisis escalator rather than a crisis reducer. Several African countries – Congo (1960–1965), Kenya (1963–1965), Uganda (1962–1966), Mali (1959) and Cameroon (1961–1972) – employed a federal system for a short period of time and then removed it.<sup>17</sup> The main reason for this removal of federalism was instability and secession for most sub-Saharan African states. A number of African countries ignored a federal structure because, as Berman<sup>18</sup> contends, the sociocultural ecology in many states of Africa is highly intermingled in terms of identity, language and religion. The most striking feature of African identities and communities is their fluidity, heterogeneity and hybridity; a social world of multiple, overlapping and alternate identities with significant movement of people, intermingling of communities and cultural and linguistic borrowing.

Nevertheless, a few countries in Africa – such as Ethiopia, South Africa and Nigeria – have experience with a federal structure to accommodate ethnic diversity.





**A striking feature of African communities is fluidity and heterogeneity; a social world of multiple, overlapping and alternate identities with significant movement of people and intermingling.**

How these federal systems operated shows significant degrees of difference – for example, Alemayehu<sup>19</sup> equates the Ethiopian case with the Bantustans<sup>20</sup> of apartheid South Africa.

### **Competing Views on Ethiopia’s Ethnic Federalism**

Ethiopia’s ethnic federalism has garnered much academic attention since it commenced with the current EPRDF regime in 1991, and has caused polarising debates among scholars. Ethiopia’s peculiar nature of federalism is both praised and condemned.

Advocators argue that the execution of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia is the only viable option for the integrity of the Ethiopian state and society. It is further celebrated by some as the panacea for holding multi-ethnic Ethiopia together. The ethno-federal arrangement is considered to maintain the unity of the Ethiopian nations, nationalities and people, on one hand, and the territorial integrity of the state on the other. It is claimed to render stability and provide each region with the opportunity to develop, promote and preserve its language and culture. Some would argue that the federal system not only fosters deliberation and political participation, but also enhances citizens’ capacity to empathise with one another more

readily than in a heterogeneous setting. The advocates argue that Ethiopian federalism can be a mechanism to end the protracted and brutal inter-ethnic conflicts that existed before its commencement. They also acknowledge it as being successful in averting the risk of the dismemberment of ethnic groups from Ethiopia, which would otherwise cause the disintegration of the state, such as in the USSR or Yugoslavia.

Others, on the contrary, posit ethnic federalism as a curse that encourages the country’s disintegration. It exacerbates and ignites identity politics and can lead to further disintegration. Critics also argue that the federal experiment has been rather provocative and causes new bloody conflicts between ethnic groups over different interrelated factors – such as new linguistic-territorial claims, competition over political power, border claims, and deprivation of rights and opportunities for minorities living in regional states that are “owned” by certain ethnic groups.

No matter how controversial it may be, what plays a significant role in the success or failure of a federal arrangement is not its framework per se, but how it is implemented. The “nationalities question” was the primary trigger of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution. Granting ethnic groups self-rule presumably had the potential for curbing



**Oromo ethnic group people mobilise following an allegation that security forces tried to orchestrate an attack against one of their leaders (October 2019).**

such problems. Unfortunately, however, the vanguard EPRDF made sure that the federal structure did not encompass such rhetoric. Moreover, the authoritarian nature of the government, coupled again with an inextricable overlap of party and government, hampered the federalism that was introduced.

It is important to consider whether the architects of the Ethiopian federation, with all the limitations and drawbacks mentioned above, had other viable options in designing the internal boundaries of the state – such as a federal design that could respond to ethnic concerns without privileging ethnic identities above other non-ethnic identities, and that would have helped to circumvent the dilemma of ethnically defined states. In due course, federalism of an ethnic kind undeniably essentialises ethnic identities and can cause ethnic conflict.

### **Ethnic Conflict**

The introduction of ethnic federalism has resulted in a number of ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia. There has been an upsurge in ethnic conflicts and the sharpening of boundaries among the different ethnic groups. Ethnicity has become an instrument of political mobilisation, which further perpetuates violence, dissension and a growing sense of

separatism in Ethiopia. Ethnicity dominates over other notions of state organisation, political representation and resource entitlement. It is also directed to the constitution of institutions that validate boundaries among the different ethnic groups. This is a formidable challenge and can lead to the eruption of many conflicts among and within regional states.

Thus, one can rightly argue that such trends, which value ethnic identity above all other forms of mobilisation, discourage shared bonds and increase tensions between clans of similar ethno-linguistic groups. This can further dismantle networks and trust among people.

The restructuring of the state into a federal system required the drawing of boundaries that – at least in theory – correspond with ethnicity. However, this process was uneven, as there is no pure overlap between ethnicity and territories due to a prodigious degree of mobility of ethnic groups in all directions. As a result, this generated a number of conflicts among ethnic groups that live in the same or neighbouring regions. An example of this is the conflict between the Guji and the Gedeo in southern Ethiopia, who used to live in the former Sidamo province before the introduction of ethnic federalism. The government policy that gave prime legitimacy for ethnic identity and ethnic rights,



and an increasing ethnic self-consciousness, has changed inter-ethnic relations in most parts of the country. In line with the principles of ethnic regionalisation, the Guji – who belong to the Oromo ethnic group – became part of the Oromia region, while the Gedeo became part of the Southern region under the new arrangement. The chief cause of the conflict is that the geographic boundaries of the regional states are not only occupied by homogenous people; the majority of the cases show that ethnicity surpasses geographic boundaries. Consequently, each regional state has a minority ethnic group that has endured the influence of the majority for years. In this specific case, the “Guji in Gedeo zone and the Gedeo in Borana zone are minorities”.<sup>21</sup>

The Gedeo and Guji conflicts are not exceptions in this regard. In 2018, over “800 000 people were displaced due to the conflict, resulting in the largest number of internally displaced persons in the country”.<sup>22</sup> Ethnic-based federalism created an asymmetrical federal structure in which larger ethnic groups, as in the case of the Oromia and Amhara regional states, were given their own ethnic regions. Smaller ethnic groups – as observed in the Southern region, Gambella region and the Benishangul-Gumuz region – were put together to establish multi-ethnic regions. Inter-ethnic conflicts in these heterogeneous regions became rampant, triggered by disputes over the sharing of political power and resources.

## Conclusion

Though ideological orientation and political landscape necessitates ethnic federalism, it accentuates conflict of an ethnic kind. Ethnic federalism in Ethiopia is presumably believed to answer the historic “nationalities question”, but it does not help in reducing ethnic tensions and conflicts. In fact, conflict is intensifying due to the ethnic heterogeneity of the regional states and the resource-boundary sharing between different groups. Conflicts are instead escalating and becoming decentralised, which seems to defy the argument that ethnic federalism can be a typical strategy for avoiding conflict in multi-ethnic societies, such as Ethiopia. ▲

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# WOMEN AND PEACEBUILDING IN GUINEA-BISSAU

BY CLARA CARVALHO

Women's organisations aimed at conflict resolution have been active in Guinea-Bissau in the past decade under the auspices of international and regional bodies, particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations (UN). Guinea-Bissau is a small West African country of about 1.8 million inhabitants<sup>1</sup> that declared independence from Portugal in 1973 after a long independence war. The country's recent history has been marked by repeated military coups, political assassinations and fragile state institutions. This article examines the role of women's organisations in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in a country marked by prolonged and systemic political crises.

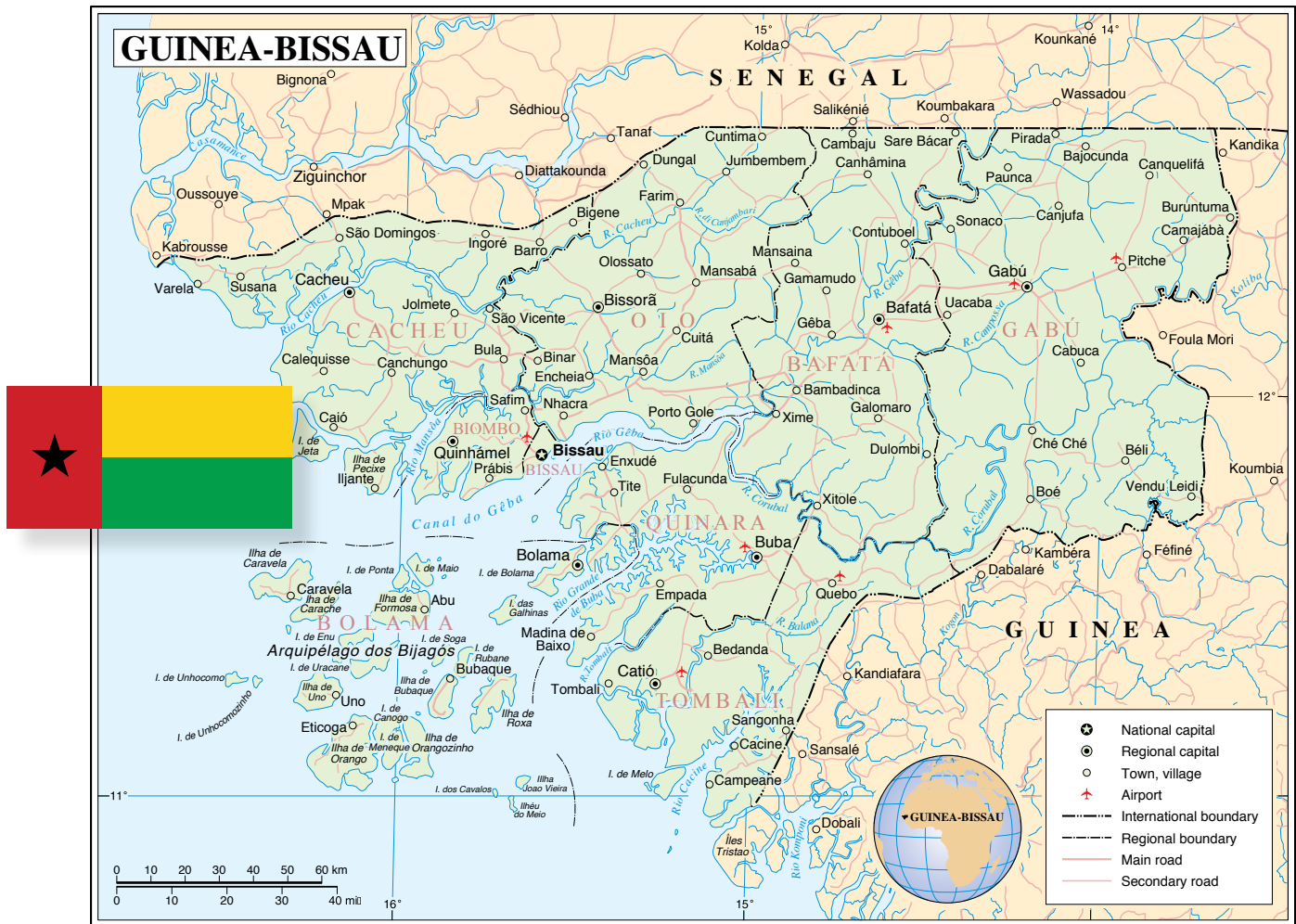
## Women's Mediating Networks in Africa

Both the Sustainable Development Goals (2030 Agenda) – particularly Goals 5, 10 and 16 – and the African Union's (AU) 2063 Agenda share a strong focus on gender equality and

women's empowerment. Gender inequality is addressed in both agendas by recognising its structural causes, including the unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunities, and how they stimulate gender violence, insecurity and lack of access to justice and affect inclusivity. However, the gender dimensions of conflict and women's roles in peacekeeping remain marginal in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction processes.<sup>2</sup>

The low level of participation of African women in peace processes (particularly as mediators in conflicts) was recognised and addressed in the 1994 Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace, and reaffirmed in several international agreements since then. Commitments made to increase women's participation in mediation and peace processes

**Above: Women remain marginal in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction processes.**



highlighted that women are not solely victims of war but also play important roles in peacebuilding. The participation of African women in formal mediation processes and peace discussions, in particular, is an important focus of UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1960 (2010), which remain poorly implemented, albeit after almost two decades of efforts. Resolution 1325, a ground-breaking decision on women, peace and security, sets the international legal framework that emphasises the importance of equal and full participation of women as active agents in peace and security. It further recognises women's undervalued and underutilised contributions to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peacebuilding; the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women; and the central role that women play in conflict management, conflict resolution, security and sustainable peace. To increase women's access to, and participation in, peace mediation and negotiations, women's capacity for mediation and negotiation needs to be enhanced and extended in all areas, including security sector reform, finance and power-sharing. The impact of conflict on women and their role in peace processes needs to be better

exposed and reflected on. The implementation of various policies related to women, peace and security (WPS) needs to be accelerated and monitored. The implementation of several networks of women mediators at the continental, regional and national level in Africa is part of the peacebuilding efforts in response to the previously mentioned UN resolutions and their follow-up within the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) implemented by the AU. In this context, the AU encouraged the creation of FemWise-Africa (Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation), established in 2017. FemWise-Africa aims to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation efforts in the APSA. The network provides a platform for strategic advocacy, capacity-building and networking to improve the implementation of commitments to include women in peacebuilding in Africa. It is also intended to be a platform that brings together different women, from political leaders to representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs), religious leaders, business and entrepreneurial members, and local and community mediators, to work in the different areas of mediation.<sup>3</sup>



Within the African continent, FemWise-Africa sets the agenda for local and national women mediator networks, bringing together women acting at the local level with national, higher-level mediators and bridging their differences. Networks of women mediators have been effective at different levels:

1. creating repositories of women experts, with experience in peace processes and conflict management;
2. ensuring training for women involved in mediation and peacebuilding;
3. creating platforms for experience-sharing between women working in different tracks of conflict resolution;
4. empowering local women and giving visibility to the work of mediators and their impact on peace processes; and
5. highlighting the role of local women in peacebuilding.<sup>4</sup>

The number of women mediator networks is growing worldwide and a Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks was recently created,<sup>5</sup> reuniting FemWise-Africa, the Arab Women Mediators Network – League of Arab States, the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, the Nordic Women Mediators and the Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth.<sup>6</sup>

Women mediator networks follow the multitrack approach, recognising the role of different actors and diverse approaches to conflict mediation. Track One implies high-level political talks involving the conflict parties, Track Two involves influential individuals from business, religious organisations or CSOs, and Track Three reunites grassroots activities.<sup>7</sup> The majority of women's organisations are active in conflict resolution work at the community level and are defined as Track Three mediators. However, the main networks present at the continental and global levels have a strong emphasis on Track One and Track Two mediation.

## THE MAJORITY OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS ARE ACTIVE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION WORK AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL AND ARE DEFINED AS TRACK THREE MEDIATORS

### Peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau: An Overview

Guinea-Bissau is characterised by continued political instability marked by successive conflicts and wars. The country obtained its independence after a long



ACCORD PHOTO

**The Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise - Africa) is a platform that brings together women from different levels to work in the different areas of mediation.**





**The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) has been in power since 1974.**

nationalist war (1963–1974) against the Portuguese colonial administration. The main nationalist movement leading the independence war, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), became the ruling party and has been in power, almost uninterrupted, since 1974. The newly independent country was first dominated by an army, with the legitimacy of having been the freedom fighters. The first president, Luís Cabral, a civilian, was overthrown by the army leader and prime minister, Nino Vieira, in a military coup in 1980. Vieira was a despotic leader who managed to stay in power for 18 years by murdering his main opponents and winning the first multilateral presidential elections in 1994. In 1998, a conflict between Vieira and his army chief, Ansumane Mané, led to a civil war that devastated the capital Bissau, while part of its population fled. Since 1999, the country's politics have been marked by sudden or violent changes in government, in 2003, 2009 and with the military coup of 2012. In 2019, political tensions between the president and the main party, the PAIGC, also led to an ungovernable situation, which required the intervention of the international community at several points.

Despite this context of continuous political turmoil, disputes in the last two decades (that is, after the 1998–1999 civil war) never advanced to widespread conflict at the

national level. These struggles have been felt mainly at the political and military levels, and have been located mostly in the capital city. However, this climate of political turbulence has justified the constant presence of international organisations leading peacebuilding initiatives in the country, and has defined the agendas of key members of the international community acting in Guinea-Bissau. It should be noted that although the country is considered to be in moderate conflict, it is part of the Senegambia conflict system, which also includes The Gambia and the Casamance region in Senegal. Tensions in each of these regions or countries spills over to the neighbouring territories, mostly between the Casamance region and Guinea-Bissau. From the perspective of international actors – principally ECOWAS – peacekeeping, peacebuilding and security solutions must be sought throughout the region.<sup>8</sup> Peacebuilding initiatives in Guinea-Bissau are a priority for the international community, supporting reform of the security sector, a review of the national legal system and integration of restorative justice, and grassroots networks for peace.

Following the 1998/1999 conflict, the UNSC, according to its resolution 1233 of April 1999, established the UN Peacebuilding Office for Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), led by a special representative of the UN Secretary-General, with the mission of facilitating general elections. The mission

was extended several times, and in 2009 the delegation became the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea Bissau (UNIOGBIS), with a mandate term deadline in late 2020. Its main objective is peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau, having worked in conjunction with the UN Peacebuilding Commission (UNPBC) and the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

The ECOWAS presence in Guinea-Bissau has been an essential peace-maintaining guarantee since the 1998–1999 conflict. In 1998, ECOWAS was crucial for the establishment of the Abuja Agreement and the creation of the Interposition Force of the Military Observer Group of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOMOG).<sup>9</sup> After the 12 April 2012 *coup d'état*, ECOWAS led efforts to produce a roadmap for peace, structuring an agreement signed in Bissau by the parties. It also created the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB) to provide security and, following the restoration of constitutional order, assisting the new government to consolidate its authority and address security challenges.<sup>10</sup> At a local level, ECOWAS has maintained the activities of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Founded in 1998, WANEP has implemented a regional early warning and response system (ECOWARN) since 2002. Guinea-Bissau has established a National Early Warning System (NEWS), with community monitors across the country. This early warning system, which is also linked to the ECOWAS Response and Early Warning Mechanism – ECOWARN – ensures the collection and analysis of early warning conflict data to alert policymakers to the implications of the measures taken or not taken.

In 2013, the main international actors, responding to the UN Secretary General's call, created a coordination and understanding platform, P5, which includes ECOWAS, UNIOGBIS, the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), the European Union (EU) and the AU. In 2014, a successful double-election process led to the constitution of an internationally recognised new government and president. The new government started a negotiation process with the EU and guaranteed substantial financial support for structural reform of the economic sector in Guinea-Bissau, which was never implemented due to another political crisis in 2015 – this time between the elected president, the prime minister and president of the main party, the PAIGC.<sup>11</sup> Again ECOWAS intervened, acting as a broker between the parties and ensuring an agreement that established the main points for a compromise government until the next electoral cycle in 2018, which was later postponed to 2019. This agreement was signed by the representatives of the main political forces, the National Assembly, and religious and civil society organisations (CSOs), and consists of two documents: the Six-point Roadmap and the Conakry Agreement.<sup>12</sup> Elections were set for 10 March 2019, but the PAIGC, the most voted party, did not win an absolute majority in Parliament. Successive proposals for constituting a government were dismissed, maintaining the threat of a political crisis. This was finally overcome in July 2019 when, after another ECOWAS intervention, a new government proposed by the PAIGC was recognised by the president and the National Assembly.



UN PHOTO/LOEY FELIPE

**The United Nations (UN) Security Council unanimously adopts Resolution 2458, renewing the mandate of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) until 28 February 2020 (28 February 2019).**





**Women are underrepresented, at a political level, in Guinea-Bissau.**

The ECOWAS intervention also recognised that presidential elections were due in late 2019, and that the president, José Mário Vaz, is limited to representative functions since 23 June 2019, the term of his constitutional mandate.

### **Women's Representation in Peace Processes in Guinea-Bissau**

In Guinea-Bissau, women's participation in political processes has been levered by international organisations, mainly UNIOGBIS and ECOWAS. Their joint efforts supporting women CSOs working in peacebuilding and civil interventions led to the visible strengthening of women's political participation. Women's organisations are now nationally recognised as actors in peacebuilding processes. This section provides an overview of the main national women's organisations and their work in peacebuilding and fighting inequalities.

Gender inequality is rooted in structural violence that relegates women to marginality and economic dependence, while having more family responsibilities and enduring domestic subordination. It is seen in different kinds of formal education (where the girls' dropout rate is higher than for boys), economic status and access to paid jobs, and women's underrepresentation in high-level institutions such as parliament and government. Guinea-Bissau has signed and ratified every international agreement to end gender discrimination and adopted legislation accordingly – such

as the law to combat female genital mutilation (2011) or the criminalisation of gender-based violence. However, at a political level, women are still underrepresented. As in other parts of the continent, gender inequality and women's political representation was first addressed by the main nationalist movement – in this case, the PAIGC, which has included a few women in government since independence. Still, this participation was never representative or expressive of a real change of women's status in the country. Women's representation decreased after the implementation of a system based on multiparty elections, a trend common in other countries that was only overcome with the adoption of quota laws.<sup>13</sup> The number of women members of parliament decreased from 20% in 1988 (under the single-party regime) to a constant 10% or 11% in recent years, rising to 13% in the last elections.<sup>14</sup> A shift in women's political representation in the government took place following the March 2019 elections, with 11 women being represented: eight as ministers and three as state secretaries. The visibility of women's organisations in peacebuilding in recent years, supported by ECOWAS and UNIOGBIS, has strongly contributed to this improvement in women's representation.

ECOWAS launched a specific programme on women in peacebuilding (WIPNET) in 2001, aimed at promoting a gender perspective in peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities that has representatives at community, regional and



national level in Guinea-Bissau. ECOWAS also supports the network of women for peace and security (REMPSECAO) as part of the Programme for the Promotion and Development of Peace, Security and Good Governance. This network aims to coordinate and optimise women's initiatives in conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction operations. REMPSECAO has been active in Guinea-Bissau since 2009, with the additional support of UNIOGBIS since 2013. It promotes dialogue between political actors and has been leading extensive work on peacebuilding awareness within the army.

## WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN MEDIATION PROCESSES HAS BEEN IMPROVING WORLDWIDE, AND PARTICULARLY ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

UNIOGBIS is mandated to include women in conflict resolution and peace processes. It follows the requirements of UNSC resolution 1325 of 2000 and the National Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of 2010, which affirm the need for effective representation of women in all sovereign bodies. Aiming at boosting women's participation in peacebuilding processes and in political representation, UNIOGBIS supported the creation of several women's organisations. The most active of these are the Women's Political Platform (PPM), created in 2008; the Women Mediator Network (REMUME), created in 2016; and the Group of Women Facilitators, created in 2017 and recently reorganised as the Guinean Council of Women Facilitators for Dialogue (CMGFD). UNIOGBIS's role was crucial for the implementation of the roadmap for gender-inclusive policy, known as the Canchungo Declaration of October 2014.<sup>15</sup> Within the joint agendas of ECOWAS and UNIOGBIS, different women's organisations working for peace and conflict resolution in Guinea-Bissau are active at Track Two and Track Three levels.

PPM is the oldest of these women's organisations and encompasses eight CSOs and every political party. Women commonly expressed that political parties use them to mobilise votes but do not take them seriously as political candidates. It was felt that apart from the sensitisation of political parties' leadership, activities should be undertaken to boost women's capacity, as well as their motivation to engage effectively in formal politics alongside their male counterparts. PPM operates at different levels and has been instrumental in the creation of laws combating gender inequality and gender violence and criminalising female genital mutilation (2011). With the support of the Network of Women Parliamentarians, PPM was also key in establishing a gender quota law in 2018.<sup>16</sup> It has a well-established women's network in the provinces that facilitates the creation of other networks, such as, REMUME.

At the Track Two level, the most visible organisation is the CMGFD. Created in 2018 by the Women's Civil Society Forum, the CMGFD initially brought together 10 women with different backgrounds occupying positions of public visibility and leadership. The group led several initiatives, ranging from dialogue promotion to peaceful and well-mediated processes, and is involved in observation and pressuring rather than mediation in the sense of proposing formulas for an end to impasse.<sup>17</sup> The leader is a well-known businesswoman, Francisca Vaz, who has been facilitating peace dialogues since the conflict of 1998.

REMUME was created in 2016 to support, strengthen and improve the skills of a critical mass of women and young mediators, and to encourage their participation, active role and effective involvement in peace processes and peacebuilding efforts in the country. REMUME has mostly been effective as community mediation. At a local level, REMUME is a platform that unites both men and women working with different organisations in conflict management. The main conflicts mediated are related to land disputes, inheritance, gender violence and cattle theft. Mediators are trained by different CSOs. REMUME includes mediators participating in organisations such as Voz di Paz, a CSO created in 2007 with UN support and the mandate to help create and broaden dialogue on the main obstacles that hinder peace in the country and to support local, national and regional actors to prevent future conflict. Voz di Paz also developed a useful participatory conflict analysis through a country-wide consultation process (peace mapping). Other organisations working in community conflict mediation include Kumpudur di Paz; the Network Against Gender Violence (RENLUV), created in 2003 and active in the areas of prevention, reduction and combating of gender- and child-based violence; the National Committee for the Abandonment of Harmful Traditional Practices for Women and Child Health (CNAPN); the Friends of Children Association (AMIC); and local representatives of WANEP. The creation of REMUME was crucial for the affirmation of women in local conflict management and mediation – a role usually attributed to the male-dominated group of traditional and religious authorities and, in recent years, to the Justice Access Centres. It reunites women with national political profile and local activists, and is by far the network with the strongest potential for implementing FemWise's objectives for women's mediation.

### Conclusion

Women's representation in mediation processes has been improving worldwide, and particularly on the African continent. Conflict and post-conflict situations are increasingly being addressed by women participating at the different axes of conflict management, with a strong emphasis on community interventions (Track Three). Guinea-Bissau, a country long characterised by protracted political instability, has experienced long-term interventions from the

international community supporting peacebuilding efforts, particularly by the UN, ECOWAS, AU, EU and CPLP. At a higher political level, the continuous support of ECOWAS in peace mediations has been effective in realising elections and monitoring the implementation of signed agreements between different parties. ECOWAS's role was essential in overcoming the crisis between the elected president and the leaders of the PAIGC, the main voted party.

To contain tensions and overcome conflicts, international organisations have been supporting women facilitators and mediator organisations. These women's organisations are mostly active at the communal level, being present in almost every village. Their roles are becoming more visible at a national level, due to their high level of participation and successful mediated activities. The joint efforts of these networks and their supporters, mostly ECOWAS and UNIOGBIS, are successful in empowering women and highlighting the need for equitable gender representation in peacebuilding efforts. The new elected government reacted to these efforts by including eight women in main ministries. Women's participation in peacebuilding activities and mediation processes at all levels are already proving very effective in Guinea-Bissau. 🗳️

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# INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY-BASED NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS: THE *QERO* SYSTEM OF MENZ GUASSA

BY GASHAW AYFERAM ENDAYLALU



## Introduction

Prior to the advent of so-called scientific knowledge and systems, indigenous knowledge was the single-most important aspect of human development utilised by communities across the world to sustain their well-being. With the advance of technology, indigenous knowledge is often mistakenly labelled as unscientific, illogical, irrational, traditional and a development impediment.<sup>1</sup> Such conceptions of indigenous knowledge resulted in

the favouring of scientifically driven approaches, which are mainly Eurocentric, as the main solutions to the development–democracy challenges of underdeveloped nations. Indigenous knowledge is also usually viewed as

**Above: With the advance of technology, indigenous knowledge is often mistakenly labeled as unscientific, illogical, irrational, traditional and a development impediment.**





**The indigenous knowledge system in Ethiopia is one of the unseen, underutilised and neglected resources with incomparable potential for development.**

valueless to sustainable development. Consequently, newly independent states in Africa, South America and Asia have followed the adoption of a “one-fits-all” approach to development.

Unfortunately, the adoption of foreign-born and -grown development and democracy models without integration into indigenous development and values creates political and development uncertainties in Third World countries. Policymakers and development planners have thus failed to achieve sustainable development. A dependency syndrome of developing states on Western fabricated development models has thus emerged.

Nevertheless, the last three decades have witnessed a paradigm shift from the total sidelining of indigenous knowledge to the importance of promoting, empowering and linking it to solutions. A new area of interest is indigenous natural resource management mechanisms. As mentioned previously, conservationists and policymakers downgraded indigenous resource management mechanisms. According to Zelealem and Williams:<sup>2</sup> “[R]ecent interest by conservationists in indigenous resource management systems, however, has arisen from the failure of many other types of conservation initiatives and the search for viable

and sustainable alternatives to current models for managing resource use.”

In this regard, Ethiopia is very rich in indigenous knowledge systems, practice, knowledge creation (such as *Qine*), architecture, medicine, agriculture, cottage industry, conflict resolution, governance, natural resource management mechanisms, terracing experience (of the Konso people) and building (of houses from stone in North Shewa and Tigray). However, these indigenous knowledge systems and practices are not systematically identified, studied, documented and utilised in a manner that meets sustainable development goals and improves quality of life. The indigenous knowledge system in Ethiopia is an unseen, underutilised and neglected resource with incomparable potential for development.

One of the most effective (but neglected) and oldest communal property conservation mechanisms was the *Qero* system of Menz Guassa. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, local communities developed and used this sustainable natural resource management system. The *Qero* system allowed for the equitable use and distribution of natural resources (thatching grass, fuel wood and grazing) that were fundamental to the livelihood and



**From a local perspective, community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) entails the management of natural resources by collective, local institutions for local benefit.**

security of the community. This article discusses community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) mechanisms, specifically the *Qero* system of Menz Guassa, from the perspectives of environmental governance and democratic values and principles.

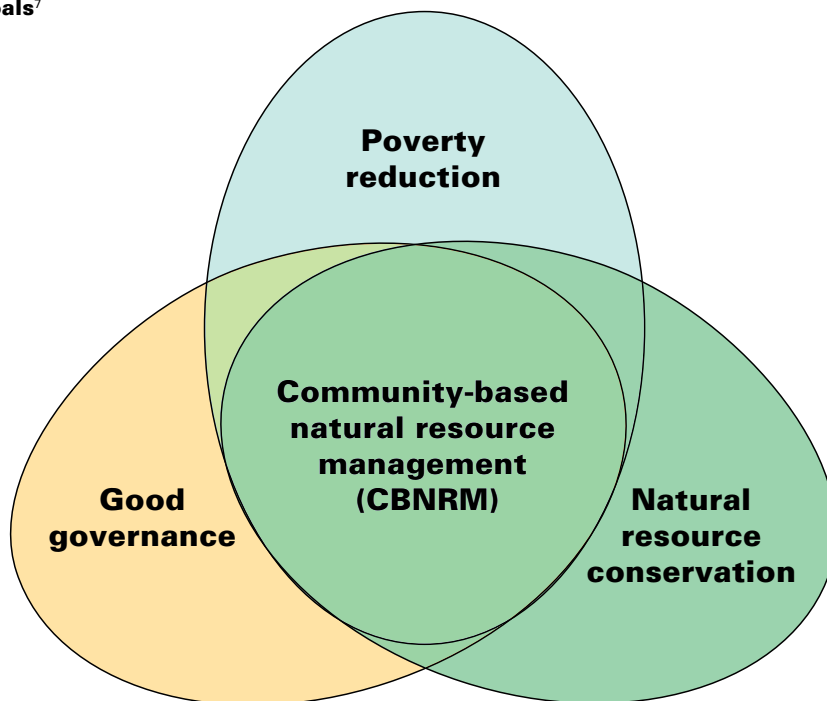
### **Community-based Natural Resource Management Mechanisms**

There are a variety of terms used to refer to CBNRM mechanisms, including participatory, community, community-based, collaborative, joint and popular natural resource management. CBNRM is an approach that evolved in the 1980s as a result of the failure of Western-born and-developed conservation models and paradigms in Third World countries. The main assumption is that development planners failed to achieve sustainable development and paradoxically created Western dependency. Therefore, communities found their own ways to survive by looking back to indigenous knowledge, which was “tried and tested, effective, inexpensive, locally available, and culturally appropriate; and in many cases [they] are based on preserving and building on the patterns and processes of nature”.<sup>3</sup>

There is no universal definition of CBNRM. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark<sup>4</sup> uses the term CBNRM to denote “all kinds of approaches to managing natural resources that fit”. Roe<sup>5</sup> viewed CBNRM from a local perspective as the management of natural resources such as land, forests, wildlife and water by collective, local institutions for local benefit. The definition given by Fabricius<sup>6</sup> supports this, as he views CBNRM as the collective use and management of natural resources in rural areas by a group of people with a self-defined, distinct identity, using communally owned facilities.

CBNRM has evolved in the last four decades to realise the sustainable use of natural resources, and that people living with the resources should be responsible for their management and should benefit from using these natural resources. CBNRM is a major global strategy for enhancing conservation outcomes while also seeking to improve rural livelihoods. CBNRM has a trinity of goals: poverty reduction, natural resource conservation and good governance. These goals have an overlapping, linked relationship. Since natural resources are the most important resources of communities, poverty alleviation is linked with natural resource use and conservation. However, natural resources are not abundant. Rather, they are scarce resources with

**Figure 1: CBNRM goals<sup>7</sup>**

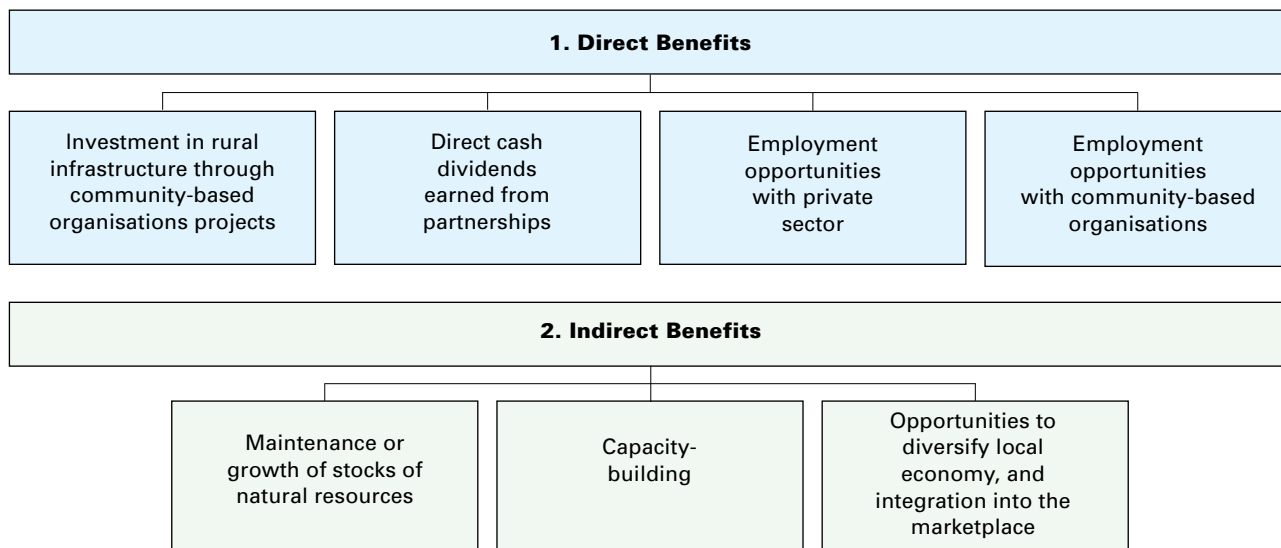


uneven distribution; as a result, they are the source of competition and conflict among communities and nations. The socio-economic and political development of a given community is largely determined by access to these scarce resources. It is thus imperative to ensure the sustainable management and use of resources based on principles of equity, community participation and good governance. Governance is the ongoing process of good decision-making; in the contemporary world, decentralisation, inclusiveness,

equity, equality and responsiveness have been increasingly acknowledged as the fundamental elements of good governance.

The major principles of CBNRM include being people-focused, participatory, holistic, building on strengths, using a partnership approach, being sustainable and dynamic. CBNRM has become the dominant conservation and development paradigm in the post-1980s, with financial and non-financial benefits<sup>8</sup> as outlined in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Benefits of CBNRM<sup>9</sup>**







**The Menz-Guassa Community Conservation Area is one of the oldest and most recognised common property resource management areas in sub-Saharan Africa.**

There are several CBNRM mechanisms that are unique and dynamic to a given community's physical environment. The Menz-Guassa Community Conservation Area is one of the oldest and most recognised common property resource management areas in sub-Saharan Africa. According to Zelealem:<sup>10</sup>

Ethiopia is home to one of the oldest, most effective conservation management systems in sub-Saharan Africa, the Menz-Guassa Community Conservation Area, an 11 100-hectare region that is home to a rich endowment of grasslands, plants and rare animals such as the Ethiopian wolf, gelada and Abyssinian hare. The history of the indigenous land tenure system known as *Atsme Irist* reveals a great deal about how people in Menz have been able to regularly use, but also preserve, valuable grazing lands and ecosystem services for more than 400 years.

#### **The Menz Guassa Community Conservation Area**

Menz Guassa, at the heart of the Shewan plateau, is home to many endemic but classified endangered plant

and animal species as a result of the existence of the *Qero* indigenous conservation system for more than 400 years. The area has variety of names, including Menz Guassa, Guassa plateau, Menz Guassa Community Conservation Area and *Ye Gera ena Asebo Serge*. The name "Guassa" is derived from the grass *Festuca abyssinica*, locally known as Guassa grass. Menz Guassa is found in the north-eastern part of the regional state of Amhara Region.

According to Amhara regional state council regulation No. 97/2012,<sup>11</sup> Menz Guassa is found in the Menz Gera Midir *woreda* (district), covering a total area of 7800 hectares

**THE MAJOR PRINCIPLES OF CBNRM INCLUDE BEING PEOPLE-FOCUSED, PARTICIPATORY, HOLISTIC, BUILDING ON STRENGTHS, USING A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH, BEING SUSTAINABLE AND DYNAMIC**



**Menz Guassa is a sanctuary for endangered wild animals, plants and birds that are endemic to Ethiopia.**

of land. It shares boundaries with the Lulgie-Seret and Meskel Ber *kebeles* (neighbourhoods) of the Efrata Gedem *woreda* to the east, as well as the *kebeles* of the Menz Gera Midir *woreda* to the west, north and south. It is a source of more than 26 rivers and is a sanctuary for endangered wild animals, plants and birds that are endemic to Ethiopia, including the Ethiopian wolf, gelada, Abyssinian hare, Abyssinian meadow rat, unstriped grass rat and shrew, and various endemic birds.

The communities in the surrounding areas of Guassa created an indigenous conservation system in the 17<sup>th</sup> century known as the *Qero* system. According to oral sources, this system was founded by the pioneer fathers, Asbo and Gera (locally called *Aqgni Abat*), who were claimed to be the sons of Abeto Negasi Krestos, founder of the

## THE COMMUNITIES IN THE SURROUNDING AREAS OF GUASSA CREATED AN INDIGENOUS CONSERVATION SYSTEM IN THE 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY KNOWN AS THE *QERO* SYSTEM

Shewan dynasty. Gomeje<sup>12</sup> indicates how the *Qero* system evolved:

The two brothers also evolved their own traditional administration system called *Qero* and *Afero*. *Qero* refers to men specially who are physically strong and have a militia experience and *Afero* refers to women and children who are considered as weak. The *Afero* serves to protect the area from cattle grazing and referring them to the *Qero* and *Qero* plays the main role in protecting the area forcefully and taking measures. *Qere* derived from the local word *Qere/ ቅ ሬ*, a traditional institution which serves the community during the time of death and funeral ceremony. The head of the *Qere* is called *Aba Qere* and those who are assigned to lead the system. *Aba-Qere* was selected from the royal family, because they had time to visit the place since they were not busy with production and other activities like the remaining community member. According to key informants, the last two *Qere*'s of the study area based on the indigenous administration system were Ato Sheresher Wolde from Gera and Ato Demeke from Asebo.

The *Qero* system was practised by choosing a headman, called an *Aba Qero* or *Afero*, who is responsible for



## THE *ABA QERO* ALSO ALLOWED PEOPLE TO USE THE GUASSA WHEN THERE WAS DROUGHT AND DURING THE TIMES WHEN HE BELIEVED THAT THE GRASS HAD RECOVERED ENOUGH

protecting and regulating use of the Guassa area. The Asbo and Gera areas each had one *Aba Qero* (*Afero*). The *Aba Qeros* were mostly elected unanimously in the presence of all users of the common property and resource. According to Zelealem and Williams:<sup>13</sup>

The user communities of the Guassa were further subdivided at a *Tabot* or *Mekdes* (parish) level. The Asbo users were organized under six parishes, while Gera users were organized under eight parishes. Each parish had one headman esquire (*Aleqa* or *Chiqa-shum*) who was answerable to his respective *Abba Qera*.

Under the *Qero* system, the Guassa area was protected from all types of interference – at least for a period of three to five years – until the *Aba Qero/Afero* announced before a church assembly to the legitimate users to use the Guassa grass for whatever purpose, to collect fuel wood and to graze livestock. The *Aba Qero* also allowed people to use the Guassa when there was drought and during the times when he believed that the grass had recovered enough. Starting from the announced date to 5 June of that year – locally known as *Hamle Abo* – the grass would be used. The grassland would then be closed on *Hamle Abo*.

### **The *Qero* System of Menz Guassa**

The *Qero* system had its own rules and regulations that were followed by legitimate users. These included law-making and enforcing mechanisms to protect, manage and use the Guassa in a sustainable manner. The area was divided into two parts: Gera and Asbo, after the two brothers who founded the *Qero* system. Those who claimed to be descendants of Gera and Asbo used Gera and Asbo's



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**Under the *Qero* system, legitimate users could use the Guassa grass for whatever purpose, including to graze livestock.**



demarcated areas respectively. Each of the areas had one *Aba Qero/Afero*. Each *Aba Qero/Afero* was responsible for his respective area.

The two *Aba Qeros* also formed the *Aba Qeros* council – the highest decision-makers of the Guassa area. Gera’s area had six parish heads, while that of Asbo had five parish heads. Both areas also had a *Yegolmasa Getoch*, who was responsible for enforcing the rules and regulations of the *Qero* system. *Aba Qeros/Aferos* were chosen unanimously by the community, based on certain criteria, in the presence of all users of the common property resource. They were responsible for protecting and regulating the use of the Guassa area. The *Qero* system rules and regulations included:

- Gag rule: a rule that limited or forbade the users rights during a known period of time. The Guassa area is protected from grazing and any type of use by the community for consecutive periods, for as long as three to five years. This rule was known as *yezīg hig*. The closure year was largely determined by factors such as drought frequency, users’ harvesting demands, recovery of the *Festuca* (Guassa) grass and local crop harvest.
- Users who claimed and traced their ancestors from Asbo or Gera had the right to use as much grass as needed during the open season of the Guassa grass, regardless of status, property and prestige.
- Users were obliged to leave the Guassa area before *Hamle Abo* (5 June).
- Users and elected *Yegolmasa Getoch* were required to strictly follow all rules and regulations of the system. Any violation resulted in harsh punishments, such as burning, beating and payments.

### **Enforcement Mechanisms**

The *Qero* system had its own law-enforcing mechanisms to protect the common property resource, which was described by the people as “*Libsachin and Gursachin*”, meaning “Guassa is our shelter and food”. It had three law-enforcing mechanisms: the entire community, *Yegolmasa Getoch* and *Aba Qeros*. First, the entire community together had a responsibility to protect their common property. Second, *Yegolmasa Getoch* were the chosen law enforcers. The *Aba Qeros* frequently followed up and supervised their respective areas with these household heads, on dates chosen by the *Aba Qeros*. According to Zelealem and Williams:<sup>14</sup> “[E]very able male household head was obliged to go out on patrol, and failure to participate would result in severe punishment for absentees. In some instances, punishment could result in burning down of the absentee’s house.”

Third, the *Aba Qeros* were also responsible for enforcing the rules and regulations of the *Qero* system. The *Aba Qeros’* responsibility in general included:

- taking measures against those who violated the regulations in a respective area;
- determining whether the *Festuca* (Guassa) grass was ready for harvest or not;
- announcing the opening date of use for the legitimate and rightful owners of the Guassa community at the church assembly, local marketplaces and funeral ceremonies, such as *Qire*. The opening day was announced by the senior *Aba Qero* after he received the blessing of an elder priest; and
- examining drought frequency, the users’ harvesting demand, the recovery of the *Festuca* (Guassa) grass and the local crop harvest particularly during the belg (rainy season).

Different punishments were meted out when rules were not followed. These punishments were often very harsh.

### **Democratic and Environmental Governance Principles and Values within the *Qero* System**

The *Qero* system had democratic and environmental governance values and principles. On the one hand, the *Qero* system was a direct, participatory democracy – *Aba Qeros* were directly chosen by the community, based on certain criteria. On the other hand, it was also a conscious democracy model as it had law-making, enforcing and decision-making institutions. The community, headed by the *Aba Qeros*, developed rules and regulations, and the *Yegolmasa Getoch* were responsible for law enforcement. *Aba Qeros* could also take appropriate measures against violators.

## **THE *QERO* SYSTEM HAD DEMOCRATIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES**

### **Democratic Election of *Aba Qeros/Aferos***

The *Qero* system was headed by directly chosen *Aba Qeros/Aferos*. According to Zelealem and Williams,<sup>15</sup> the *Aba Qeros* were mostly elected unanimously, in the presence of all users of the common property resource.

### **Sustainable Natural Resources Conservation System**

The other environmental governance value found within the *Qero* system was sustainability. The system was based on the principle of sustainable biodiversity conservation. In Ethiopia, various government-owned and -protected parks are vulnerable to fire and destruction. However, there is no recorded history of the destruction of the Guassa area. This is attributed largely to the *Qero* system that prevailed, which ensured the sustainable availability of Guassa grass and its associated resources.

### **Equality of Use and Equity**

The *Qero* system was founded on the principles of equality and equity. For equality to prevail, the first step was to recognise the equal rights of users. The second step was to ensure the equal utilisation of available resources. In this regard, the *Qero* system recognised the equal rights of each user, and had rules and regulations based on equity. The community, as descendants of Asbo and Gera, had full unconstrained rights to use the Guassa grass for whatever purpose they required during the permitted open season, regardless of the position, status and property they had. Rich and poor users had equal rights.

### **Acceptable Communal Conservation System**

The *Qero* system was a communally accepted institution. For any system to be democratic, it must have the free consent of the populace. In this regard, the *Qero* system was an institution based on the free consent and unwritten covenant of the Asbo and Gera communities.

### **Conclusion**

The *Qero* system was an effective, indigenous, communal natural resource conservation mechanism in Ethiopia. It was in effect until the 1974 revolution, after which it declined due to the sociopolitical changes taking place in the country. The *Qero* system had modern environmental governance values and principles such as sustainability, equality, equity and participation. Moreover, it was a direct and conscious democracy model, with values such as free consent of the community, the democratic election of *Aba Qeros/Aferos*, representation of the community and recognition of users' full rights. What made the *Qero* system successful was the existence of rules and regulations, with enforcing institutions. The *Qero* system had a dual function: on the one hand, it was a natural resource conservation, protection and management mechanism, and on the other hand, it was a mechanism of community livelihood. The *Qero* system showed that there is an imperative to indigenise government conservation mechanisms and policies. While it is unlikely that the *Qero* system will be revitalised in modern-day Ethiopia, it is important to realise that local conditions and interests must be considered when mechanisms are developed to protect and manage communities. **A**

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# COMMUNICATIONS SHUTDOWNS: CONFLICT IN KASHMIR AND CAMEROON

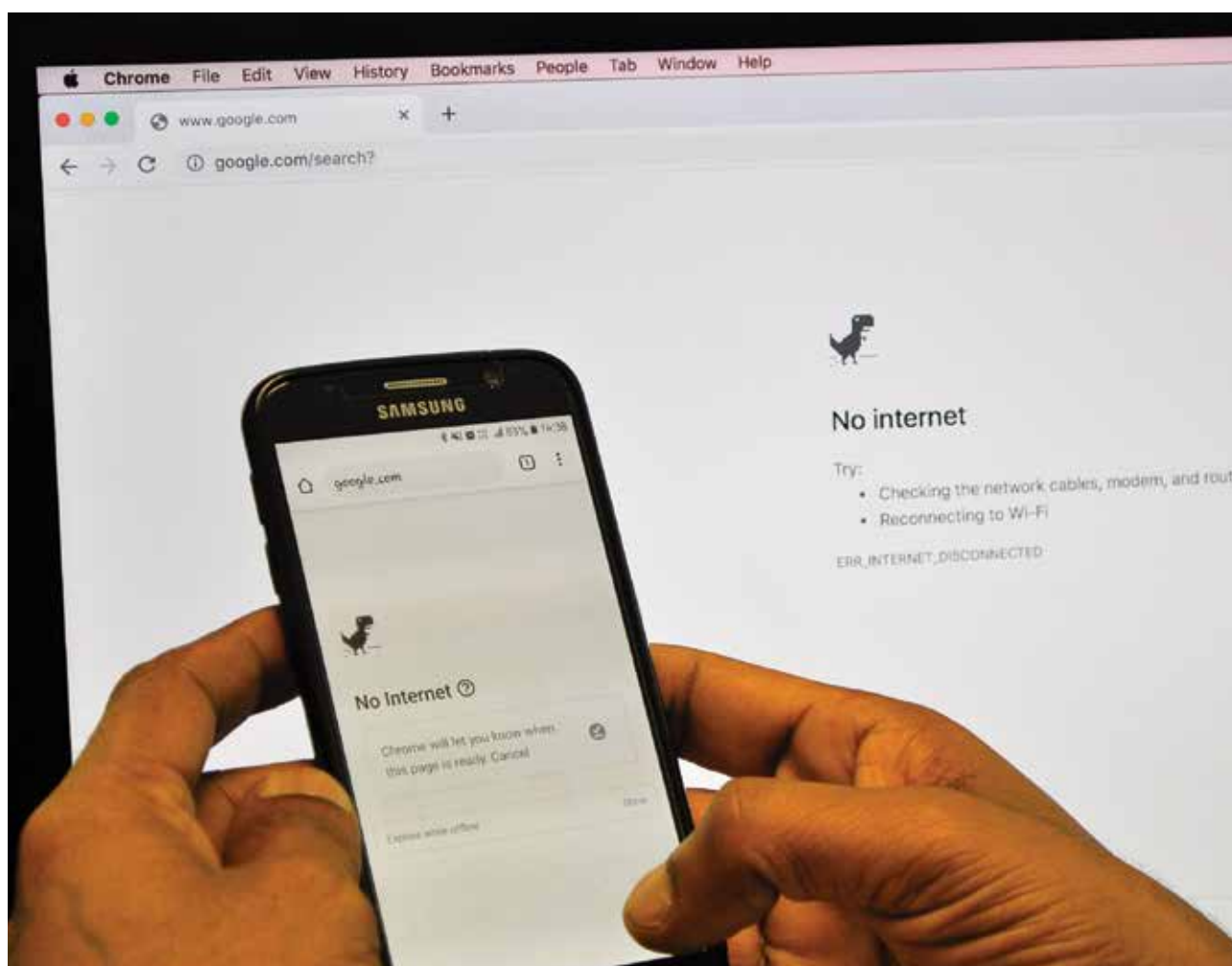
BY IRENE DAWA



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**The communications shutdowns in Cameroon and Kashmir involved disrupting telephone, internet and mobile networks.**

## Introduction

Internet shutdowns – and especially social media disruptions – in Africa are becoming more frequent, mostly around election times and during national exams. A significant communications shutdown occurred in Cameroon in 2018 and lasted 249 days, costing the country US\$38853 122.<sup>1</sup> In 2016, an internet shutdown in India cost US\$968 080 702.<sup>2</sup> Data shows that globally, India leads, with 70% of all known large-scale shutdowns.<sup>3</sup> In Africa, Cameroon leads, with 249 days in 2018.<sup>4</sup> Some of the reasons cited by governments for shutting down the internet and communications includes national security, political events and school exams.

A communications shutdown entails cutting people off from the rest of the world, creating ambiguity and frustration and preventing access to information, which triggers strikes or protests that may become violent. This article examines two case studies – Kashmir and Cameroon – where recent communications shutdowns have led to violent conflict.

The information for Kashmir was collected qualitatively – that is, observation and interviews were the key tools used, during a visit to Kashmir in 2019. Ten key informant interviews were conducted with different stakeholders who were affected by the crisis. The interviewees worked in local hospitals or small businesses. In the case of Cameroon, a desk review was undertaken to understand and analyse the conflict. Information was also gleaned from non-governmental organisations working in Kashmir and Cameroon.

The communications shutdowns in Cameroon and Kashmir involved disrupting telephone, internet and mobile networks. These recent events in the two countries, which hampered people's ability to communicate with each other and be informed, and which also included detention of people without trial, especially in Kashmir, violated Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reasons and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

Also, Article 9 states: “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrests and detention.”<sup>5</sup> and calls for the right of political prisoners to have access to justice and get fair trials, which was apparently not the case.

There is a close link between conflict, human rights and the denial of rights, as they can lead to the frustration of needs related to identity, welfare, freedom and security, which are fundamental rights for survival. If rights are denied, needs are frustrated – which can lead to violent conflict as people seek ways to address their basic needs and violated rights.<sup>6</sup> Everyone has the fundamental right to express their opinion, as indicated by the United Nations (UN): “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”<sup>7</sup>

### The Kashmir Context

The Indian subcontinent in Asia has a population of 1.2 billion people and a total land area of 3 287 263 sq.km<sup>8</sup>

(including the disputed area of Kashmir). India is a very diverse country, with a large community of Hindus (80.5%). Hindi is the national language, spoken by 30% of the population.<sup>9</sup>

The Kashmir Valley lies within the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir in the north-eastern part of India, with the Line of Control (LoC) – that is, the border with Pakistan – along its northern and western borders. It covers a geographical area of 15 938 km, with a population of 6.9 million people, according to the Indian national population census of 2011.<sup>10</sup>

The state of Jammu and Kashmir has been the scene of a longstanding dispute between India, Pakistan, the Kashmiri population and, to a lesser extent, China since its accession to India on 26 October 1947.<sup>11</sup> When Britain announced its plan to partition British India on 3 June 1947, it informed the princely states that Britain would not be able to recognise them as independent dominions, and expected them to ally with either India or Pakistan. Congress members informed Hari Singh, the Maharaja, that he should be ready to join either of the states. Given the fact that 77% of his subjects were Muslims, he would do well to entertain the wishes



GALLO IMAGE/AFIEDUARDO SOTERAS

**Kashmir has been the scene of a longstanding conflict between India, Pakistan, the Kashmiri people, and to a lesser extent, China.**



**Maharaja Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession in October 1947 which acceded the State of Jammu and Kashmir to the Union of India.**

of his people of wanting to be with Muslim Pakistanis.<sup>12</sup> At independence in 1949, the Maharaja had no agreement with either country and, in the following weeks, Pakistan exerted pressure on the Kashmir Valley to join Pakistan. This forced the Maharaja to ask for military support from India, which led to the Indian military occupation of the Valley.<sup>13</sup> India sent troops to the Valley on 27 October 1947 to protect the Maharaja from any aggression from Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that the state's accession to India in 1947 was provisional. This understanding was formally acknowledged in the UN Security Council resolutions of 13 August 1948 and 5 January 1949. Both Pakistan and India agreed that accession would remain fully in force and could not be unilaterally discarded by either party until a referendum was held by the people. Since then, the Indian and Pakistani governments entrenched themselves in their positions and took a stand regarding the Kashmir issue and where it belongs. India's position is that the entire Jammu and Kashmir was signed over to India, while Pakistan insists that a referendum should take place so that the people can decide whether they want to be part of India or Pakistan.

India and Pakistan have fought a number of wars, and India has clear military superiority over Pakistan. Pakistan

also "donated" a part of Kashmir (the Korakoram Valley, which is part of Gilgit) to China, and China built a road between China and Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> India fought a war with China and lost a large section of Ladakh.<sup>16</sup> India also consolidated its position over Ladakh by integrating its territory into the Indian union. At this point, many Kashmiri youth chose violent recourse, and the militancy began.

In 1989, an armed insurgency started in the Kashmir Valley after local elections were allegedly rigged and the results were not accepted by most Kashmiri people. This armed struggle is explained differently, depending on whom you listen to. Most Kashmiris view it as a fight for freedom, India views it as a proxy war fought by Pakistan, Pakistan likes to portray it as a fight by Kashmiris to join Pakistan, and some extremist religious groups see it as part of the holy *jihad* for Islam. Since the early 2000s, the armed struggle has gradually evolved into a civil struggle. A ceasefire agreement along the LoC was signed in 2003 (however, it has been broken regularly) and, from 2008 onwards, the most commonly seen acts of resistance have been strikes – often called by the separatist leaders – and massive protest rallies by the general population.

## **BOTH PAKISTAN AND INDIA AGREED THAT ACCESSION WOULD REMAIN FULLY IN FORCE AND COULD NOT BE UNILATERALLY DISCARDED BY EITHER PARTY UNTIL A REFERENDUM WAS HELD BY THE PEOPLE**

On 4 August 2019, Article 370 (35A) of the Indian constitution, which gave Kashmir its special status, was scrapped in parliament. The state of Jammu and Kashmir was abolished in terms of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, and was divided into two union territories: Ladakh in the east and Jammu and Kashmir in the west. The people of Kashmir, in particular, fear that this was done to change the demographics of the state by making Muslims a minority group through eventually settling non-Kashmiris in the state.

It has been six months since August 2019 when the entire state was put under severe restrictions. At the time of writing, the Indian government made sure there was no access to internet and prepaid phones, including SMS, for all networks. The Indian government deployed an additional 150 000 troops in Kashmir before scrapping Article 370 of the Indian constitution that gave special autonomous status for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, to avoid incidents of violence and mass protests in the Valley. All communications means (mobile phones, internet, landlines, mail) have been suspended. The entire state remains completely cut off from the outside world, causing great despair to people,





**Kashmiri protesters clash with Indian police in Srinagar, Indian administered Kashmir. Authorities imposed curfews and suspended internet services to stop street protests.**

who are unable to contact their friends and family in, and outside, the state. All political leadership and their associates have been detained by house arrest or in hotels converted into prisons, most businesses and educational institutions are closed, and there is no public transport in operation. The Indian government claims that this is done to “keep the population safe” from being brainwashed by what it calls “anti-government militants”.

### **The Cameroon Context**

Cameroon, a coastal country located in Africa covering an area of 475 442km, lies on the western side of Central Africa, on the Bight of Biafra, a bay on the eastern Atlantic Ocean. The country is bordered by Chad, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Republic

of the Congo. Cameroon’s 2019 population is estimated at 25.88 million citizens, with roughly 20% being anglophone.<sup>17</sup>

From 1884, Cameroon and parts of its neighbouring areas became the German colony of Kamerun, with the capital initially being Buea, and later Yaoundé. After World War II, this colony was partitioned between Britain and France under the 28 June 1919 League of Nations mandate. France gained the larger geographical area, transferring outlying regions to neighbouring French colonies, and ruled the rest from Yaoundé. Britain’s territory was a strip bordering Nigeria from the sea to Lake Chad, and was administered from Lagos.<sup>18</sup>

On 1 January 1960, French Cameroon gained independence and became *La République du Cameroun* (the Republic of Cameroon). The British-controlled southern Cameroon was then separated from Nigeria and was due to achieve full independence on 1 October 1961. However, the UN organised a referendum in which southern Cameroonians were asked to choose between joining the Republic of Cameroon or Nigeria. This vote was prompted by a British report that insisted its former territory would not survive economically on its own.

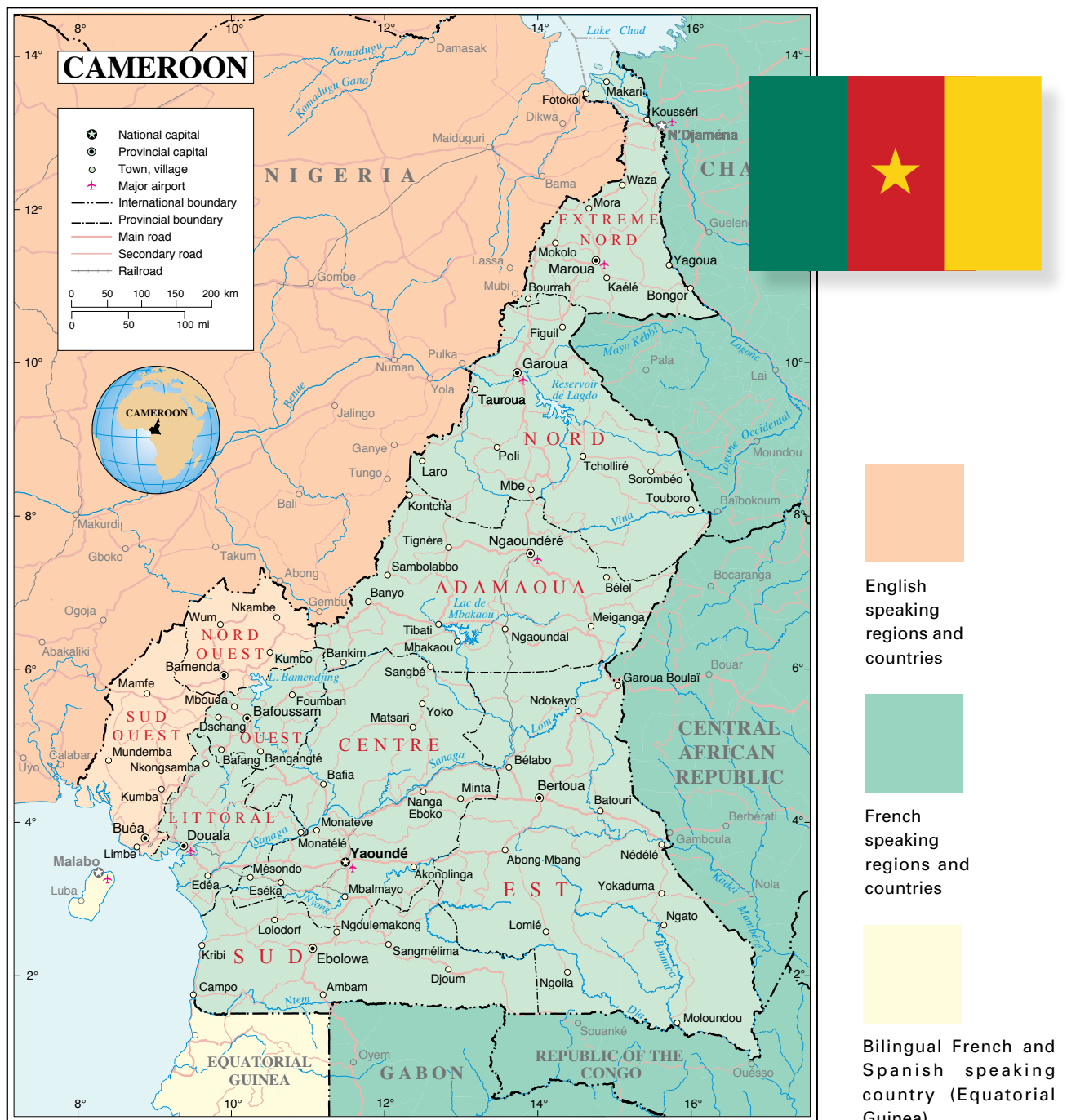
At this point, southern Cameroonians wanted nothing more to do with Nigeria. They had suffered enormously

**THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT CLAIMS THAT THIS IS DONE TO “KEEP THE POPULATION SAFE” FROM BEING BRAINWASHED BY WHAT IT CALLS “ANTI-GOVERNMENT MILITANTS”**

at the hands of the Igbo people, who had settled in their territory in previous decades. Therefore, they elected to unite in a new federation, becoming the Federal Republic of Cameroon. It was supposed to be a partnership of equals – a notion reinforced by bilateral negotiations that had started before the vote. These negotiations were concluded at the Fomuban Conference in July 1961.<sup>19</sup> The general view after the conference was that the delegation from the Republic of Cameroon, accompanied by French advisors, got virtually

everything they wanted. The anglophones, who received none of the support promised by the British or the UN, felt sidelined.

As such, the new federation was born, but it was never a happy union. The region has been centrally governed, but neither of the two presidents since unification have been from the anglophone region – which led to the anglophones pushing for autonomy. This call was supported in a UN resolution, passed in April 1961, which defines the



Source: Map of Cameroon showing the English-speaking area in the Northwest and Southwest regions<sup>20</sup>



**Teachers and lawyers from the anglophone region participate in a protest march to demand better treatment.**

joining of the two former territories as a federation of two states, equal in status and autonomous.

The current tensions are between English-speaking Cameroonians and the government, dominated by French-speaking Cameroonians. The French-speaking government has ruled the country in an authoritarian way since the unification of the two former UN trusteeship territories in 1961.<sup>21</sup> In 1972, the original federal structure, which was based on post-colonial unification, was abrogated. The English-speaking or Anglophone West Cameroon was annexed in a “United Republic”, and in 1984 the word “United” was scrapped. The country became Cameroon and the English-speaking region was assimilated into the French-speaking area. The statehood of the anglophones was slowly minimised – not by the French-speaking (francophone) community at large, but by the francophone-led and dominated government. This led to feelings of loss of identity and frustration among anglophone Cameroonians.

As frustrations grew, from 2016, protests became common in anglophone Cameroon. The youth took to the streets, and later, teachers and lawyers from the anglophone region demanded better treatment. Their discontent stemmed from the forced use of the French

language, reduced opportunities for anglophone people and limited economic resources given to the anglophone region. It is important to note that the Cameroonian government provides all communication and documents only in the French language. French teachers with little English knowledge were sent to teach in anglophone schools, while French-educated civil law judges are sent to anglophone courts, which use the English common law system. Of the 36 ministers who are in charge of department budgets, only one is an anglophone.<sup>22</sup> The budget allocated to the anglophone region is said to be disproportionately small. On 17 January 2017, the government ordered the suspension of internet services in the Northwest and Southwest anglophone regions of Cameroon following protests. Ironically, this was to avoid further protests and

**THEIR DISCONTENT STEMMED FROM THE FORCED USE OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE, REDUCED OPPORTUNITIES FOR ANGLOPHONE PEOPLE AND LIMITED ECONOMIC RESOURCES GIVEN TO THE ANGLOPHONE REGION**





**Demonstrators march in Bamenda, during a protest against perceived discrimination in favour of the country's francophone majority (22 September 2017).**

the spread of what they called “fake news”. The shutdown lasted 94 days and adversely affected the region’s 5 million residents. Since then, there have been further sporadic communications shutdowns, which have led to violent protests in the country.

**Impact of Communications Shutdowns on Citizens**

In Cameroon, the long period of internet blockage angered people and led to protests escalating into clashes with the police, during which at least four people were killed and many others injured.<sup>23</sup> The internet blackout created “internet refugees”, as anglophone Cameroonians were forced to travel into francophone regions or Nigeria for internet access. “Silicon Mountain”, which is a nickname coined to represent the technology ecosystem (cluster) in the mountain area of Cameroon, was particularly crippled by the loss of internet. The blackout also adversely affected entrepreneurs, whose businesses collapsed as a result of the shutdown and they were unable to find work in the major French-speaking areas. After weeks of commuting from Buea to the commercial capital of Douala to access the internet, technology developers built an internet “refugee camp” in Bonako,<sup>24</sup> a village near the tollgate separating anglophone Southwest from the francophone region of Littoral.

In Kashmir, the complete communications shutdown has also led to human suffering. It has impacted on everyone’s life in some way. Businesses, such as tourism (including the hotel industry), private hospitals, pharmacies and grocery shops have all been severely affected.



**The #BringBackOurInternet campaign was a protest of the government-sanctioned internet shutdown in Cameroon.**



**A soldier guards a roadside checkpoint outside Srinagar International Airport in Jammu and Kashmir, India.**

An interview with hospital authorities in Srinagar confirmed that hospitals ran out of supplies due to the shutdown. Notably, because of its long history of conflict, Kashmir has high rates of mental health issues (45% of adults), according to a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Kashmir mental health survey in 2015.<sup>25</sup> And a study by Action Aid in 2016 found that 58.69% of respondents have been exposed to traumatic experiences.<sup>26</sup> In interviews conducted in several hospitals, psychiatrists reported a 50% increase in mental health patients, who are having difficulty coping with the situation during the shutdown. Doctors also reported cases of relapsing patients due to the recent happenings. One doctor said in an interview<sup>27</sup> that due to the lack of cellular networks, medical teams at hospitals are facing difficulties in communicating with each other during medical emergencies.

Political leaders in Kashmir remain detained to ensure that there is no effective leadership to mobilise any potential response to the shutdown. Imams have been warned not to stray into politics or incite “the protesters”, with the threat of immediate arrest, and security forces have forbidden Muslim religious celebrations. There is an increased presence of Indian security forces around the mosques during times of prayer, particularly on Fridays, while both formal and informal gatherings are banned or

monitored by security forces. Heavily armed checkpoints with razor wire, and random searches – both at checkpoints and other public areas – are commonplace and effective as a form of intimidation. People, particularly young men, are being randomly detained.

Shops and businesses remain closed, except for a short period in the morning or evening; schools remained closed in protest. In one interview,<sup>28</sup> a participant explained: “The people are caught between the security forces, who want Kashmir to appear to be functioning normally, and the separatists/freedom fighters and the protestors, who want the shops to remain closed.”

At the time of writing, it was not clear what the Indian government planned to do to resolve the situation in the Kashmir Valley.

### **The Way Forward**

The communications situation in Kashmir has not improved – the internet is still blocked in the Valley; landlines and post-paid phones are working, but not everyone can afford these lines. As a result, part of the population is still cut off from the rest of the world. In Cameroon, things have calmed down for some months, but the conflict is far from resolved. The tricky element of communications shutdowns is that they address the





**A large diplomatic delegation of foreign envoys from 17 nations arrive in Kashmir to assess conditions, as it remains in complete lockdown and internet shutdown (9 January 2020).**

immediate need of governments to control information flow that could lead to protests and violence, which might be perceived as good on the one hand – but on the other hand, the lack of communication creates rumours and frustration, as most people start to depend on unverified information that could have further negative consequences. Thus, communications shutdowns are an ineffective way of controlling protests because the resultant anger and frustration further triggers conflicts, which can lead to escalated violence. Communications shutdowns seem to be a quick-fix solution for authorities in the short term, but in the long run, they are neither sustainable nor effective.

The communications shutdowns that led to conflict situations in Kashmir and Cameroon have different dynamics and need different responses. The Kashmir conflict is more complex, with both national and international dynamics. A single solution at one level will not work – there is need for multiple solutions at different levels. Organisations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), with the support of the UN, could help resolve this conflict. The Cameroon case has regional dynamics affecting neighbouring countries.

Therefore, regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with support from the African Union (AU) peace and security component, could play a key role in resolving the conflict. Focusing on the Cameroon agreements that have not been respected – from the Fouban Conference to the UN’s resolution of 1961 regarding autonomy – the AU could act as a mediating party to ensure that these agreements are revisited and respected. The UN, as the custodian of these agreements, can also initiate forums to revisit these agreements.

Regional organisations can start by engaging the concerned governments and the leaders of the regions that are affected (anglophone Cameroon and Kashmir) in dialogue, as well as engaging community leaders at the grassroots level to understand the issues on the ground. Relaying information and experiences from people at the community level to the top levels of leadership is important. This could lead to meaningful dialogue and negotiations that include all relevant voices and stakeholders. Dialogue has unique and highly valuable properties. It can “strengthen relationships and trust, forge alliances, find truths that bind us together, and bring people into alignment on goals and strategies”.<sup>29</sup> In other words, engagement through dialogue will provide an opportunity to people at different levels to have their voices heard. When people communicate, there is opportunity for feedback, interaction and relationship-building.

However, trust is not built overnight, and these conflicts have long histories that have affected many generations. Fostering trust will be a gradual process. In Kashmir, a major step in this direction can be gained by the government releasing all political leaders and youth who are in detention, and allowing them to access the justice system. The people of both Kashmir and Cameroon must be allowed to speak and express their feelings openly, without fear of being arrested and detained.

These communications shutdowns have created related conflicts that do not have quick-fix solutions because they are tied to other serious issues (marginalisation, exclusion of minority groups, inequality, underdevelopment, and so on). To fully address the needs of the people will not only be a matter of restoring communications. While people have suffered more directly recently as a result of the communications shutdowns, the governments of Cameroon and Kashmir must address all issues, including the root causes of these conflicts, such as identity group conflict. They must also address the generational trauma that has been caused by marginalisation. It is not in the interest of Yaoundé and New Delhi to keep silencing people. Instead, Cameroon and India need to open space for more communication and dialogue. **A**

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