Transitions and Peace Building in Africa's Great Lakes Region

Anastase Shyaka

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/pcmr

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/pcmr/vol1/iss1/7
the conventional justice. Other innovations comprise the Committee of Mediators “Abunzi”, the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, the sensitization sessions “Ingando” which were initially intended for the former combatants, but were finally extended to the various categories of the population.

I would not however fail to point out that some of these mechanisms have often been misunderstood by some of our foreign partners, as a result, I think, of their originality nature.

It is therefore imperative and useful for us that the partners who assist us in our transition and peace building processes, invest more effort to understand the complexities and peculiarities of the situations which we are brought to administer, the challenges we are to face, the limits of the classic schemas and the opportunities which are created by these innovative mechanisms.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Dear participants,

I hope that these two days will allow you to exchange on the various themes of the conference which address such issues as the post electoral process, military reintegration, citizenship, identity and the question of refugees, and the various mechanisms for managing transitions. Debates will be all the more enriching as this conference gathers speakers from the Great Lakes countries which have each its own experience which will benefit the other participants.

I would not end without thanking once again the organizers of this conference as well as the speakers who have accepted to come and share their experiences with the other participants. I also thank all those who have contributed in one way or another to the success of this conference.

To you all, I wish fruitful debates.

It is on this remark that I officially open the International Conference on “Transitions and Peace Processes in the Great Lakes Region”.

Thank you

***************

THEME I: TRANSITION AND PEACE BUILDING: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Transitions and Peace Building in Africa’s Great Lakes Region,
By Prof. Anastase SHYAKA

This presentation focuses on the following points:
Understanding / defining the concept of transition and its linkage to peace building.
Overview of transitions which occurred in the Region since late 50’s, emphasizing the impact
of transitions' past failures on the conflict system formation in the region.
Assessing ongoing transitions in the countries of the region (Rwanda, Burundi, DRC, and Uganda).

Transition can be understood as a process of a change from an uncomfortable situation to more acceptable situation. Transition from war to absence of violence; from totalitarian regime to some sort of democracy; from unelected to legitimate democratic government.

Traditionally, however, transition means a form of government negotiated between political actors for a political management of a society in unstable situation. Transition is usually terminated by elections aiming at putting in place a post transitional government. Transitions can be therefore of different nature: political, social, economic, etc.

Today, transitions are more complex than their classical meaning. The socio-political reality in post-conflict period shows that elections do not put an end to the transition. Countries still led by non conventional and transitional mechanisms and tools and fall therefore in the category of “countries in transition”.

Since late 50's the four countries in the region had three critical transitions, unfortunately at the same time. recorded three critical failures. Burundi, DRC, Rwanda and Uganda passed from the colonial to independent state. However, like most of Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) states, all these 4 GL countries have failed that transition. The causes underlying that failure are mainly:

The Hutu-Tutsi antagonism in Rwanda and Burundi, International interferences and ethnic antagonism in DRC, North-South cleavage and its corollaries in Uganda. These causes are today among the very fuelling factors of current conflicts.

The second wave of transitions occurred in early 90's. All the 4 countries embarked on democratic change agenda: it was a transition attempt from the totalitarian regimes to democratic system of government. Once again, like many countries in the SSA, all the 4 GL countries have failed this transition. As a consequence, in all the 4 countries, socio-political crisis and violent conflicts have, since then, intensified. Up to date, they are struggling to overcome the legacy of that failure whose principal features are as follows:
The legacy of Hutu Power in Rwanda, Hutu/Tutsi ideologies in Burundi, Chronic instability, rwandophobia and partial state dysfunction in DRC.

The last wave of transition is more related to the region as a whole than to individual countries and refers to the 1994 genocide and the failure of countries in the region to control the regionalization of conflict. It also refers to the lack of real determination to build sustainable peace in the region. Since then, conflicts in respective countries have evolved in conflict system, which has continuously resisted or neutralized all peace initiatives.

Today, Rwanda, Burundi, DRC and Uganda are in sort of transitions, different but with some common directions. They are emerging from armed violence and social disintegration. They
are struggling to achieve peace, democratic governance and socio-economic development. Schematically, the situation can be described as follows:

Current Features of Transition in the GLR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>The Legacy of Identity Based on Violence and Ethnocracy</td>
<td>Social Cohesion and Democratic Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D R Congo</td>
<td>The Legacy of Partial State Failure, Corruption, Poor Governance and Armed Violence</td>
<td>State building, Stability, Social Justice, Democracy and Peaceful Coexistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>The legacy of Genocide and Poverty</td>
<td>Nation Building, Social Cohesion and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Identity Based Violence and Political Uncertainty</td>
<td>Democratic Government and Human Security</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Compilation of the author*

The political management of transitions is the condition *sine qua non* for building sustainable peace, stability and development in societies exiting from violent conflicts. Unless such issues are adequately addressed, durable peace will remain uncertain in the GLR.

For Rwandans, Rwanda is more than just a geographic space. It is a principle, an ideal and a state of mind. At present Rwanda is made up of a legacy of common memories and of a present characterized by the duty to live together.

Gacaca, as a concept and an institution, is part of the traditional system of conflict resolution. Its specificity is to be community-based and participatory. Based on unity of Rwandans, Gacaca makes concrete the principle, shared by other peoples, according to which an individual has rights and responsibilities only as a member of his/her clan or his/her family.

According to the philosophy on which Gacaca is based, any offense tarnishes the image not only of the individual who committed it, but also the family to which he/she belongs. Gacaca is the space where offense can be mended. It is