AU, Conflict, and Conflict Resolution in Africa: comparative analysis of the recent Kenya & Zimbabwe conflicts

Brian-Vincent O IKEJIAKU, Dr.

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/brian-vincent_ikejiaku1/3/
AFRICAN UNION, CONFLICT, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN AFRICA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE RECENT KENYA AND ZIMBABWE Conflicts

BRIAN-VINCENT IKEJIAKU*
Research Institute for Law, Politics and Justice, Keele University
United Kingdom
ike.bvo06@yahoo.com
b.v.o.ikejiaku@ilpj.keele.ac.uk

JUBRIL DAUDA
jubrildauda@yahoo.com

This paper examines African conflicts and the roles of the African Union (AU) in conflict resolution, focusing on the recent Zimbabwe and Kenya conflicts. Two conflict and conflict resolution theories: Hobessian realism and Burton’s human needs theory were considered. This paper finds that ethnicity, elections in Africa, colonial manipulation of Africa’s boundary, and longstanding land struggle contribute to Africa’s conflicts; employing a comparative perspective however, it contends that the primary cause of the Zimbabwe and Kenya conflicts is the failure of the governments of Mugabe and Kibaki to address the basic needs of the people. This paper concludes that unlike other conflict resolution theories/mechanisms, the AU should stress the improvement of the governance institution in order to persuade the governments in Africa to respond to the basic needs of the populations. This is the major stipulation of needs theory, which is compelling for understanding the causes of conflict and conflict resolution in Africa.

Keywords: Conflict; conflict resolution; good governance; African Union; Hobessian realism; Burton’s human needs theory.

1. Introduction

This paper responds to the quest and clamor for answers to numerous challenges arising from conflicts confronting most of the African countries. The paper highlights some of the crucial elements of the conflicts in Africa, particularly the means of conflict resolution adopted to address such destabilizing conflicts in Africa, with a focus on particular case studies (Zimbabwe and Kenya).

There is no doubting the fact that conflict pervades many of the countries in the African continent. The African continent over the past three decades, particularly
in the 1980s and 1990s, has faced greater challenges to stability and progress in all ramifications than ever before. In particular, threats to peace have been much more pronounced and indeed have increased in scale and intensity (Solomon and Watt, 2005). Statistics show that of 116 conflicts recorded by Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) since the end of the Cold War until 2003, only seven were between states — 109 were internal, and Africa had more than 32 of these between 1989 and 2003 (UCDP, in UNODC, 2005). A study on conflicts around the world conducted by the University of Maryland’s Center for International Development and Conflict Management found that 33 countries were at high risk for instability and of these, 20 were in Africa (Dare, 2001). Kaplan (1994) in his widely read but controversial essay The Coming of Anarchy predicted the fragility of many African states because of political and social chaos and instability. Although the continent continues to clamor for the dire need of peace, it has continued to witness a number of conflicts in recent times, for example, the Kenya conflict in 2007 and the Zimbabwe conflict in 2008.

Though scholars may disagree on the nature, sources, appropriate categorization, and most effective resolution mechanism for the conflicts in Africa, such disagreement may in fact lead to an eventual clarification of the critical issues by applying new thinking and a fresh approach to analyzing old problems and resolving new ones (Deng and Zartman, 1991). However, to categorize, Africa could be said to have witnessed four major types of conflicts, these include secessions, civil wars, regional conflicts, and internal crises (riots, rampages, violent demonstrations, and communal clashes) (Ikejiaku, 2009, p. 18), Conflict has destabilized most African countries; Wanyande (1997, p. 2) discloses that the costs of conflicts in Africa in terms of loss of human life and property, and the destruction of social infrastructure are enormous:

Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in many of the countries in which the conflicts occur. Many others have also suffered and continue to suffer untold psychological trauma associated with conflicts [...] once conflicts occur, scarce resources are inevitably diverted to the purchase of military equipment at the expense of socio-economic development.


However, since the end of the Cold War in 1989, considerable progress has been made toward the achievement of peace, security, and stability in most African countries with the use of conflict resolution instruments or mechanisms. Conflict resolution refers to all those activities that are concerned with transforming destructive and armed conflict along constructive and nonviolent channels (Haus, 2001). Various conflict resolution mechanisms, such as mediation, arbitration, negotiation, and peacekeeping have been employed by different bodies or agencies, such as local communities, the governments of the conflicting states, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), and even the international community, such as the United Nations, in order to bring peace and stability in conflicting states of Africa.

This paper, however, concentrates on the conflict resolution by the AU in the African continent, with a particular focus on the resolution of the recent conflicts in both Kenya and Zimbabwe.

2. Theoretical Explanations for Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Peace and conflict studies are concerned with the transformation or resolution of conflict and the building of amicable and positive peace. However, successful and effective conflict resolution and transformation requires thorough and systematic understanding of the root or remote cause of the conflict, which would consequently provide the fundamental ground on which strategies for resolution, prevention, and intervention can be mapped-out by conflict resolution and negotiation experts, peace researchers, activists, agents, and/or concerned institutions. In order to understand peace and conflict resolution mechanisms, it is important to look at the theories underpinning the subject. The theories must be such that they help in the understanding of the causes of conflicts. This paper looks at two theoretical explanations (Hobessian realism and Burton’s human needs) for conflict and conflict resolution.

2.1. Hobessian realism

Hobessian realism relates the cause of violence or conflict to human beings’ natural inclination to aggressiveness or situations that provoke aggressiveness (Lorenz, 1997). This pictures mankind in a state of nature as having general cantankerous or aggressive inclination: “in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death” (Hobbes, in Tunkin, 1983, p. 168).

By definition, human impulse to sin, aggress, or dominate cannot be stamped out, it requires control or balancing by countervailing force. As Burton (2009)
puts it:

If inherent aggressiveness is the problem, then conflicts just have to be lived with, while controlled as much as possible by police and deterrent strategies. Conflict resolution, that is, getting to the source of the problem, becomes irrelevant; knowing the source and cannot be altered. At best, there could be corrections of perceptions and adjustments of personal behavior in particular cases.

This suggests that conflict is due to human aggressiveness, especially male aggressiveness, which is derives from the consequences of human evolution and the survival-of-the-fittest. It is then natural and requires control by the police and other paramilitary and social agencies to be equipped and to map-out strategies on how to deter or control the participants’ behavior in conflicts. The import of this theory is that it prescribes the view that violence is caused by human nature, and then the response to an outbreak of violence or conflict may be to alter human nature (Rubenstein, 2001). Alternatively, those in authority may see repression as the ultimate solution (Wanyande, 1997).

2.2. Human needs theory

The human needs theory provides a framework of analysis that centers on the unmet human needs. The theory that unmet human needs are the remote source of conflict and violence is a well established idea in the fields of politics, international relations, and development studies (broadly connoted) particularly in the specialism of peace and conflict resolution (Marker, 2003; Burton, 1990a, 1990b; Coate and Rosati, 1988). Human needs theory stipulates that there is more likelihood of conflict and violence as a result of unmet human needs, psychological and physiological, rather than that of interest, as people strive to fulfil their needs (Burton, 1990a). Both Maslow and Burton (in Marker, 2003) viewed these needs as not limited to food, shelter, and water, but rather extend to include nonphysical elements needed for human growth and development, participation, control over their own life, as well as all those things human beings are innately driven to attain.

For Burton (1997), the concept of basic human needs offered a possible method of grounding the field of conflict analysis and resolution (which he and a few other pioneers had essentially improvised during the 1960s) in a defensible theory of the person. Together with other peace researchers (Coate and Rosati, 1988; Lederer, 1980), he set out to reframe the concept in order to provide the new field with a convincing alternative to the prevailing paradigms of preventing Post-War social science: mechanistic utilitarianism, behavioralism, cultural relativism, and Hobbesian “realism” etc. (Rubenstein, 2001). In Burton’s view, the needs most salient to an understanding of social conflicts were not only material (food and shelter), but also included needs of identity, recognition, security, and personal
development. Over time, however, he tended to emphasize the failure of existing state systems to satisfy any of these needs, which is the primary source of modern ethno-nationalist struggles. However, he pointed out that the level of importance of any or a combination of these needs depends on the socioeconomic, cultural, and political development of a country (Burton, 1990a).

Burton (2009) points out that aggressions and conflicts are the direct result of some institutions and social norms being incompatible with human needs. His submission is that aggression and antisocial behaviors are stimulated by social circumstances. There are human limits to abilities to conform to or withstand such institutions and norms, since human beings are not wholly malleable. The needs that are frustrated by institutions and norms require satisfaction; they certainly must be pursued in one way or another. Denial by or inability of society to provide material basic needs, recognition, and identity would lead, at all social levels, to alternative behaviors designed to satisfy such needs, be it ethnic conflict, street gangs, or domestic violence. The great promise of human needs theory, in Burton’s view, is that it would provide a relatively objective basis, transcending local, political, and cultural differences, for understanding the sources of conflict, or designing conflict resolution processes, and for founding conflict analysis and resolution as an autonomous discipline (Burton, 1990b).

The implication is that the needs theory is particularly useful for understanding the causes, resolution, and management of conflict in the developing regions, such as Africa.

This theory of understanding conflict in Africa is strikingly crucial because it moves beyond theories that blame conflicts in Africa on a primordial past, such as colonialism or neo-colonialism, global market or Africa’s failure to follow Western development culture. It is also different from the theories that attribute the causes of conflicts to the inherent aggressiveness of man. In addition, it is different from the theories that see conflict causation as the natural instinct of human being to aggress and thus concentrate on using the police and other paramilitary agencies for controlling conflicts. The human basic needs theory emphasizes instead, the problems of the (domestic) institution of government’s inability to meet the basic needs of the population, as the source of conflicts. As argued, Burton pointed out that aggression and conflicts are the direct result of some institutions and social norms being incompatible with human needs. He tended to emphasize the failure of existing state systems to satisfy any of these needs, which is the primary source of modern ethno-nationalist struggles. In Africa, the denial or neglect of the basic needs (such as material needs; recognition of different ethnic groups, particularly the minority groups; neglect of certain identities, such as the human cost of unemployment to the youths seeking their identity in society; and other needs) is the major source of conflicts. Just as the theory stipulates, when such non-negotiable basic needs are unmet, conflict is inevitable.
The view, therefore, is that the sources of conflict concern the failure of some institutions and social norms, particularly the leadership institution, and has to do with the nature of governance. If this is the case, as this paper will reveal, then the solution may be to alter the governance system by addressing those aspects of the system that may impede the realization and sustenance of peace. The conflicts, for example, in the Greater Horns of Africa (Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Zaire, Ethiopia, Somalia, Angola, and others), in West Africa, (Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, and others), in Southern Africa (Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and others) and in North Africa (Egypt and others) have governance implications. They all involve primarily, questions of the use or misuse of political power in the management of public affairs. Granted, therefore, it would be misleading to treat most conflicts in Africa as either ethnic, clan, religion, or race as it is commonly depicted in some of the academic literature on Africa’s conflicts. Just as Rupesinghe (1989) argues, behind ethnic conflicts are other structural issues transcending immediate grievances. Also, Doyle (2006) in discussing Nigeria’s conflicts, submits that the tribal or ethnic tags often used to describe other violence in Nigeria do not explain the heart of the problem,

Although Africa’s most populous nation does have religious and ethnic splits, these are often exaggerated and are invariably manipulated by political/leaders in their quest for high office — which in Nigeria means access to the country’s vast crude oil receipts. Nigeria’s combination of poverty for the majority and wealth for the few makes it an ideal breeding ground for the sort of violence, which led to conflict…(Doyle, 2006).

The problem lies in governance, particularly on the failure to respond to the needs of the masses. As Nyong’o (1993, p. 2) notes, “states, or governments for that matter, justify their existence on the grounds of being able to competently manage conflicts and to ensure social progress or development.”

Scholars such as Sandbrook and Irobi, therefore recognize the importance of needs theory. Sandbrook (1982) emphasizes the vital nature of the provision of what he calls “basic needs” as the panacea for solving social crises in developing countries. Irobi (2005), points out that the overriding importance of this theory in managing social conflict and other instability in Africa is that it moves beyond theories (such as liberalism, dependency, colonialism and modernization) that blame African conflicts and other instability on a primordial past or international system. However, this rather stresses the ineffective institutions’ (particularly the institution of governance) inability to provide and satisfy the basic human needs of their citizens. Irobi maintains that whenever such non-negotiable needs are not met, conflicts and other instability, such as breaking of laws and organized strikes, are inevitable. Furthermore, he argues, that when leaders and states are not transparent and accountable, they fail to address the important issues with basic needs so that
violence brews (Irobi, 2005, p. 3). More so, in their much elevated work, which stresses the overriding importance of human needs theory, Doyal and Gough (1991) rejecting fashionable subjectivist and cultural relativist approaches, explain that human beings have universal and objective needs for health, survival, and autonomy and a right to their optimal satisfaction. They argue that developed and underdeveloped economies should strive to meet their citizens’ needs and that these needs are not really the same in both types of economies.

In Africa, strategies such as coercive methods as implied by the power politics, balance of power, and use of state agents to suppress conflicts, would be ineffective in modifying the conflict behaviors, resolution of conflicts and consequently creating peace in the continent if/when the basis of the conflict is unmet human basic needs. In other words, conflict resolution should not still mean the use of adequate force to bring about some desired result. However, if social conditions were the problem, then conflict resolution and prevention would be possible and effective by removing the sources of conflict: institutions could adjust social norms to the needs of persons. For example, there should be improvement in the nature and mode of governance in Africa to accommodate and benefit the masses, that is, the poor. This may involve stimulated thinking that considers all shades of opinion or that brings together different points of view. There are acceptable means for example, of giving a sense of identity to the person at the workplace, to young people, to minorities and ethnic groups, and catering to the need to provide food, water, housing, electricity, health, education, and other necessities of life. There is the need to consider these basic human needs in Africa as a strategy of preventing conflicts. Unlike the above theory (and other theories), which point to inherent aggressiveness as the source of conflicts, the basic human needs theory grounds political violence and social instability in unmet basic human needs (as a result of failure in government), and it focuses on peaceful resolution of conflicts. This will be the framework for analyzing conflict and conflict resolution in this paper. This paper, therefore, will employ the human basic needs theory for understanding conflict and its resolution in Africa, particularly in the recent Zimbabwean (2008) and Kenyan (2007) conflicts and the efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution. That is to say, conflict resolution means getting to the roots or remote cause of the problems and resolving them in ways that further the longer-term goals of all concerned — the human needs theory deals with these.

3. First Case, Zimbabwe

The 2008 election conducted in Zimbabwe was the immediate event that directly led to the conflict, thereby deepening the political and social crisis in the country. President Mugabe’s 28 years in the mantle of leadership has been characterized by bad policies, corruption, and repressive governance and his ZANU-PF party
bears primary responsibility for the severe economic slide, growing public discontent, and Zimbabwe’s international isolation (International Crisis Group “ICG”, 2008a).

Zimbabwe, on March 29, 2008, held joint presidential and parliamentary elections that were blemished by a high level of pre-poll manipulation. The elections were officially witnessed or observed by only countries, institutions, and other representatives that were seen as “very friendly” and other neutral bodies and institutions, mostly Western media, were barred from observing the elections. Though the election activities were distorted, amidst manipulations by the ZANU-PF, the citizens of Zimbabwe clearly indicated or rather demonstrated their rejection of the status quo that was the then current political situation in Zimbabwe. This is because for the first time, ZANU-PF lost control of parliament to the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which made extraordinary and unmatched gains in rural areas (ICG, 2008a).

The African Briefing No. 51 of May 21, 2008 described the scenario in its report:

The 29 March 2008 elections have dramatically changed Zimbabwe’s political landscape. For the first time since independence in 1980, Robert Mugabe ran second in the presidential voting, and the opposition — the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) — won control of parliament. The MDC went to the polls deeply divided, but Morgan Tsvangirai and his party regained their authority by winning despite an uneven playing field (ICG, 2008b).

However, rather than allowing the spirit of democratic tenets to reign or take its course, Mugabe’s ruling party under Robert Mugabe and his radical supporters took all possible steps to thwart the genuine outcome of the elections and thereby coerce victory. For example, they took uncompromising moves, such as withholding the results of the presidential election, launching a country-wide campaign of violence, repression, and intimidation.

This bad political climate and political posture of the ruling party under Mugabe forced Tsvangirai the opposition leader to withdraw from the second round run-off of the presidential election fixed on June 27, 2008, over election hostilities. Due to the increase of domestic, regional, and international condemnation and criticism regarding the nonfree and unfair election and violence, the ZANU-PF and the two MDC divisions began initiating talks on July 24, under the mediation of South African President Mbeki. The series of peace talks and negotiations finally culminated in a power-sharing deal between Mugabe and Tsvangirai that was eventually signed on September 11, 2008 (ICG, 2008b).

The implementation of this power-sharing deal, however, has seriously been impeded, since the ruling party under Mugabe refused to put this deal into effect.
Within this period, the general welfare and humanitarian situation for the majority of Zimbabweans has continued to deteriorate. There have been food shortages; inadequate health care services and other necessary social facilities for the citizens, causing the outbreak of diseases, such as a cholera epidemic; and inflation became so high that the cost of basic necessities became out of the reach of an average Zimbabwean. For example, according to the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industry (CZI), industrial output is at about one-third of its pre-2000 level, resulting in a negative economic growth rate of $-4.4\%$. Recent data from the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe (CCZ) puts annual inflation above 13,000%, a rate the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicts could reach 100,000% by the end of the year. Four out of five Zimbabweans are unemployed, basic commodities such as bread, sugar, and maize meal are unobtainable, and shortages of fuel, electricity, and water are a daily occurrence; social services have broken down, with hospitals and clinics operating without adequate medical equipment or supplies (CZI and CCZ, in IRIN, 2008). Also the African Group pictured and reported the scenario thus:

Zimbabweans continue to face economic turmoil and corruption, severe food shortages and the collapse of vital services. HIV/AIDS among adults stands at over 20%, while a mounting cholera epidemic has left over 1,500 dead. By January 2009 the annual inflation rate stood at over 200 million % — the world’s highest by far — making day-to-day life for Zimbabweans increasingly difficult […]. Up to a third of the population is thought to have fled over recent years, and remittances from the growing Diasporas have become a lifeline for many remaining (IRIN, 2008).

The human needs theory emphasizes the problems of the (domestic) institution of government unable to meet the basic needs of the population as the source of conflicts. As argued, Burton points out that aggressions and conflicts are the direct result of some institutions and social norms being incompatible with human needs. He tends to emphasize the failure of existing state systems to satisfy any of these needs, which is the primary source of modern ethno-nationalist struggles. In Zimbabwe, the denial or neglect of the basic needs (e.g., material needs and neglect of certain identities, such as the human cost of unemployment to the youths and land rights) by the government of Mugabe is the remote source of the conflict. Just as the theory stipulates, when such non-negotiable basic needs are not met, conflict is inevitable.

In response to the conflict in Zimbabwe, there has been a chorus of condemnation from Western leaders and the international community, such as the UN Security Council and EU, and African regional organization and civil society, such as the African Union (AU) and South African Development Community (SADC) over the withholding of the results and the rising violence.
4. Second Case, Kenya

The Kenyan crisis of 2007–2008, which comes in the form of political, economic, and humanitarian crises, was the direct consequence of the December 27, 2007 presidential election. The crisis erupted after the incumbent President Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner. However, Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and his supporters alleged electoral malpractice; this allegation was widely confirmed by both domestic and international observers (BBC News, 2008).

The announcement and swearing-in of Kibaki was followed by a mix of opposing reactions from the supporters of ODM coalition because of their ethnic and geographical diversity. Besides staging of nonviolent protests, opposition supporters engaged in violent rampages in different parts of the country, most noticeable in Odinga’s home of Nyanza Province, the slums of Nairobi, and part of his Langata constituency. The crisis that was more of targeted ethnic violence rather than violent protests intensified and was initially directed against the people of Kikuyu, the community in which Kibaki is a member. This particularly affected those living outside their traditional settlement areas, mainly in the Rift-Valley Province. The violence intensified when over 30 unarmed civilians were killed in a church near Eldoret on New Year’s Day (the Rift-Valley has been known for tensions, which caused a lot of violence in past elections in Kenya). Some of the people in Kikuyu were also involved in violence against the opposition groups that supported Odinga, especially Luos and Kalenjin and basically in the areas surrounding Nakuru and Naivasha (ITN, 2008).

In Mombasa, Kenyan Muslims took to the street to protest the electoral manipulations and air their own grievances. Though ethnic tension played a role in these protests, hardship being experienced by the masses, especially the poor actually intensified the violence, as looters also struck a number of stores in Mombasa. The slums of Nairobi saw some of the worst violence, some ethnically motivated attacks, some acts of outrage at extreme poverty, and some the activities of criminal gangs. The violence continued sporadically for several months, particularly in the Rift Valley (ITN, 2008).

It is important to point out that it was also clear that the longstanding conflicts over land, social injustice, especially deepening poverty and inequality fuelled the crisis. According to different estimates at least 1,000, but perhaps more than 1,500, people were killed altogether, mainly in the Rift-Valley, Nyanza province, and Nairobi. At least 3,500 people (but probably a much higher number) were evicted from their homes, mostly in the Rift-Valley (Harneit-Sievers and Peters, 2008, p. 141).

As argued, according to the human needs theory, conflict is likely to occur when the institution of governance neglects or fails to meet the basic needs of its citizens (e.g., basic material needs, needs of identity, recognition needs, needs of
security and protection, and needs of self-fulfillment). The importance of these basic needs differ from the South and the North, developed and developing world, rich and poor countries. However in Africa, the most important need for now is that of basic material needs, such as food, water, health, shelter, and basic education. The fact is that most governments in Africa have failed the people in providing their basic needs, and this is the remote or primary cause of most of the conflicts in the continent. When the masses notice that the government they elected into power cannot deliver, in the form of meeting their basic needs, they normally vote such governments out of power in the subsequent election. However, the fact is that once elected into power, most leaders are very reluctant or unwilling to step down from the corridors of power, hence the consequential conflict(s).

In relation to Kenya’s case, the main stake in this most recent election was whether voters would re-elect Kibaki, who had brought great expectations to the 2002 election. However during his term in office, there was disillusionment over his aspirations to new politics, and particularly, the lack of improvement of social and economic conditions of the majority, and morally unjust political life, especially due to a consistently high level of corruption and worsening inequalities as the country experienced rapid economic growth (Calas, 2007). Some of these negative economic consequences in spite of the rapid economic growth in Kenya were presented by Porhel (2007, p. 236):

With inequalities which were already high at the beginning of M. Kibaki’s term (the country was ranked tenth on the world’s list of countries with the highest level of inequality in terms of wealth), worsening and the HDI continuing to drop since 1990. It is true that when a poorly performing economy begins to grow quickly, as was the case in Kenya, the inequalities become more pronounced. The growth which was concentrated on the service industry, only benefited part of the population, which was close to the president. While the poorest classes experienced reduction in their purchasing power. Kenyan youths, who make up the majority of the population, felt particularly neglected. In a country where life expectancy is 55 years, the persistent under-employment in this section of the population can only be troubling.

As early as during the 2005 constitutional referendum, which the opposition-backed “No” campaign won, voters had opted to punish the disappointing government personified by an ageing and a stuttering president” (Calas). It is reasonable to argue that because the Kibaki government was not able to deliver the wishes of the people, essentially by providing their basic needs, he was voted out in the December election in 2007 (this was the view of most domestic and
international observers during the election in Kenya), just as Harniet-Seivers and Peters (2008, p. 133) argue,

The officially-declared victory of the presidential election by the incumbent President Mwai Kibaki was disputed by the opposition, civil society, domestic and international observers alike. In a rather surprising move the international community stood united, did not endorse the presidential election results and put pressure on Kenya’s political leaders to solve the crisis.

The initial reluctance by the ruling party to heed the call of the people (both domestic and international) was followed by the post-election crisis, amidst violence and hostility. Harneit-Sievers and Peters (2008, p. 139) describe the scenario during the violence:

The arson of the church at Eldoret at New Year’s Day, with at least 35 refugees inside being burnt alive, constituted perhaps the most gruesome example of violence in Kenya’s post election crisis. Attacks on “settlers” in the Rift Valley probably left several hundred of people dead; the fear they generated accounted for the vast majority of the casualties. 200–300,000 people who were initially displaced during the first two weeks of the crisis.

Therefore, it is believed that the best conflict resolution strategy in Kenya and supposedly, in most conflict-ridden African states, would be to concentrate on the improvement of the institution of governance, in relation to its inability to fulfil the basic needs of the people, as Burton’s human needs theory stipulates.

5. The AU and Conflict Resolution in Africa

The AU was established in order to respond to the problem of conflicts in the African continent. When African leaders adopted the AU Act in 2000, they were crucially conscious of the fact that the scourge of conflicts in Africa constitutes a major impediment to the socioeconomic development of the continent and of the need to promote peace, security, and stability as a prerequisite for the implementation of a development and integration agenda (Nsongurua, 2002). Consequently, the Act sets out as some of its objectives, promotion of peace and security, and stability on the continent, and establishment of the necessary conditions that enable the continent to play its rightful role in the global economy and in international negotiations (Nsongurua, 2003). These objectives are supported by principles including the establishment of a common defence policy for the African continent; the peaceful resolution of conflicts among member states of the union through such appropriate means as may be decided upon by the Assembly and; (iii) the prohibition of the use of force or threat to use force
among member states of the union, (iv) peaceful co-existence of member states and their right to live in peace and security; (v) the right of member states to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security (Ceuppens, 2006).

5.1. The AU and conflict resolution in Zimbabwe

The role of the AU in conflict resolution in Zimbabwe was not so deep or pronounced until June 2008 when the African Union Assembly was involved. This is because the ZANU-PF with President Mugabe as its leader welcomed only the mediation efforts of the SADC (Southern African Development Community), a body that he created under the leadership of South African President Thabo Mbeki (Scott, 2008). The mediation efforts of SADC have been supported by the work of Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, aimed at reconciling the political parties. The AU only became more fully involved in the resolution of the Zimbabwe conflict after the former South African President Thabo Mbeki’s agreement in June 2008 to expand the mediation process to include the African Union, the United Nations, and other SADC officials (Banya, 2008).

This was followed by the AU Resolution Summit on Zimbabwe. The African Union Assembly, meeting in its 11th Ordinary Session on June 30 to July 1, 2008 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, declared deep concern:

- “with the prevailing situations in Zimbabwe;
- with the negative reports of SADC, the African Union and the Pan-African Parliament observers on the Zimbabwean Presidential run-off election held on June 27, 2008;
- about the violence and the loss of life that has occurred in Zimbabwe.”

The AU equally considered among others:

- “the urgent need to prevent further worsening of the situation and with the sub-region;
- the need to create an environment conducive for democracy, as well as the development of the people of Zimbabwe.”

The AU further expressed its appreciation to SADC and its organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, as well as the facilitators of the intra-Zimbabwe dialogue, Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, and Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission (Pambazuka, 2008).

The AU Assembly, recognizing the complexity of the situation in Zimbabwe, also noted its recognition of the willingness of the political leaders of Zimbabwe to enter into negotiations to establish a Government of National Unity (GNU). Since
the preparatory discussions on the matter of GNU had started, under SADC facilitation, the AU Assembly therefore decided:

- “to encourage President Robert Mugabe and the leader of the MDC Party Mr. Morgan Tsvangirai to honour their commitment to initiate dialogue with a view to promoting peace, stability, democracy and the reconciliation of the Zimbabwean people;
- to support the call, for the creation of a Government of National Unity;
- to support the SADC Facilitation, and to recommend that SADC mediation efforts should establish a mechanism on the ground in order to seize the momentum for a negotiated solution;
- to appeal to states and all parties concerned to refrain from any action that may negatively impact on the climate of dialogue;
- and in the spirit of all SADC initiatives, the AU remains convinced that people of Zimbabwe will be able to resolve their differences and work together once again as one Nation, provided they receive undivided support from SADC, the AU and the world at large” (Pambazuka, 2008).

The AU is experiencing some difficulties in brokering peace among the conflicting parties, because of different positions taken by both Mugabe and the opposition leader Tsvangirai. For example, on one hand, Mbeki’s mediation role in the crisis for more than a year had been increasingly criticized, particularly by Tsvangirai’s MDC, which accused him of being soft with Mugabe. Tsvangirai had previously refused to enter formal talks unless government militias stopped violence, which according to him has killed 120 of his supporters. The opposition leader also wanted Mugabe to recognize his victory in the first round of the presidential poll that was held on March 29, 2008. According to Tsvangirai, “this is just the first step on a journey whose duration of success is dependent on the sincerity and good faith of all parties involved” (Banya, 2008).

On the other hand, Mugabe has dismissed the MDC as a puppet of the West and vowed never to let it take power and has insisted that the opposition accept his landslide victory (Banya, 2008). Mugabe’s obstinate stand was demonstrated at the AU summit at the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, where President Robert Mugabe’s spokesman, George Charamba frowned upon and shrugged off the suggestions that his country could follow the example of Kenya’s power-sharing government. According to Mr. Charamba, “Kenya is Kenya, Zimbabwe is Zimbabwe. We have our own history of evolving dialogue and resolving political impasses the Zimbabwean way….”. (ITN, 2008).

The AU summit was particularly an attempt to overcome divisions on how to deal with the re-election of Mr. Mugabe in a poll that has been condemned around the world. Mugabe was the only candidate in the presidential race after Opposition Leader Morgan Tsvangirai withdrew from the ballot because of attacks on his
supporters. The AU members and the leaders of their individual African countries who appear to be divided between those who want a strong statement on the condemnation of the state affairs on Zimbabwe and others who are reluctant to publicly censure or criticize the veteran leader Mugabe (Alistair, 2007).

For example, the Sierra Leone President Ernest Bai Koroma, a member of the West and East African Group in a most critical view of Mugabe, said, “the people of Zimbabwe have been denied their democratic rights. We should, in no uncertain terms, condemn what has happened” (ITN, 2008). Also, the Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga (a part of the power-sharing government with President Mwai Kibaki that ended a bloody post-election crisis earlier in 2007) strongly advocated that the AU should suspend Mr. Mugabe until he allowed free election and peace to reign in Zimbabwe (ITN, 2008).

Till date the conflict in Zimbabwe has not been finally resolved and the AU is still working hard to see to the complete resolution of the conflict.

5.2. AU and conflict resolution in Kenya’s crisis of 2007–2008

The general political discussions, conflict resolution, and peace analyses regarding Kenya’s crisis clearly reveal that the AU “as a body” did not participate or involve itself in the conflict resolution and mediation processes in Kenya. Rather, Ghana’s John Kufuor, “probably” based on his position as the Chairman of the AU, former individual heads of states, and other prominent or influential Africans in their personal capacity; and the East African Community (not as a body) together with diplomats from the United States and the European Union were involved in the conflict resolution and mediation process in Kenya. Therefore, it is difficult to identify the specific role played by the AU (as a body) in the resolution of Kenya’s crisis of 2007–2008. However, the part played by the AU members, particularly the AU Chairman John Kufuor, in an attempt by the international community to resolve the crisis will be examined.

The views of Harneit-Sievers and Peters (2008) are in agreement with the above perception that the AU as a body played no pivotal role in resolution and crisis mediation in Kenya. They argue:

While neither the East African Community nor the African Union as institutions took a clear position on the conflict, the Chairman of the African Union, individual (former) heads of state and other prominent Africans came to Nairobi, Kenya to offer their help in bringing the opponents together. Diplomats of the US and the EU consistently and publicly refused to give full recognition to the election outcome as it stood … (p. 141).

AU Chairman (John Kufuor) and newly elected Chairman of the African Union Commission (Jean Ping) were the direct official members of the AU who were
involved in the resolution of Kenya’s crisis, yet the involvement of Jean Ping was not well known.

Odinga canceled his planned rally that was supposed to be held on January 8, 2008, with the initiation that he was willing to participate in the mediation process, facilitated by the former Ghanaian President and African Union Chairman John Kufuor; Odinga having initially refused any direct talks with Kibaki, unless with Kufuor’s participation (Baras and Ombaka, 2008). As Gnecci (2008) puts it, Odinga refused Kibaki’s offer to hold talks unless they took place as part of international mediation, and stated that without Kufuor being present to mediate, the talks would be a “slideshow” and “public relations gimmick”, and that Kibaki was using the offer of the talks with Odinga to divert attention from Kufuor. There were mixed views regarding the visit of Kufuor to Kenya; one of the views was that Kufuor was not going to travel to Kenya because the government did not view him as a welcomed visitor; the other view was that he was required by his official responsibility as AU chairman to try to resolve the crisis in Kenya.

Kufuor, on January 9, met separately with Kibaki and Odinga. The two sides later agreed to an immediate cessation of violence as well as any acts which may be detrimental to finding a peaceful solution to the ongoing crisis. However, according to Nyongo, the secretary of ODM, the talks eventually failed when Kibaki refused to sign an agreement (already signed by ODM representatives) presented to him by Kufuor. The agreement would have provided for an interim coalition government and an inquiry into the Electoral Commission. The government blamed Odinga for his failure to respond to Kibaki’s offer of dialogue (BBC News, 2008). Kufuor left Kenya on January 10 on the grounds that both parties had agreed to continue peaceful talks with the former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

On January 22, when Annan arrived in Kenya, expectations were running very high. He arrived at a point when the violence was turning to inter-ethnic militia warfare. Annan employed his enormous reputation with all sides in Kenya and with great deal of diplomatic skill, brought Kibaki and Odinga together for direct talks for the first time since the elections. While it is not the focus of this research to examine the conflict resolution role(s) by other institutions, personalities and foreign officials or envoys (except that of AU), what is important to note is that Annan did not leave Kenya until he succeeded in brokering a compromise signed by Kibaki and Odinga on February 28, 2008. The signed deal involved the creation of the post of a Prime Minister and the sharing of ministries on equal basis, all these in the context of “grand coalition government” between the PNU/the ODM-K and the ODM, which served as the resolution of the Kenya’s post-election crisis (Harneit-Sievers and Peters, 2008, pp. 141–142).
6. Brief Comparative Overview of the Conflicts and Major Lessons Drawn from the Empirical Cases

The conflicts in both Zimbabwe and Kenya happened at a strategic period when the world was looking at the two countries for the consolidation of democracy (as was the case in South Africa in 1999), Zimbabwe having been under the rule of Robert Mugabe for about 28 years, while in Kenya, Kibaki took over in 2002 from the Moi’s long years in office. The high expectation for the consolidation of democracy in these two countries failed, particularly in Kenya, where no one among the domestic and international community had foreseen the possibility of the election turning into a major violent crisis.

Though the direct cause of the conflicts in both Zimbabwe and Kenya was the result of the manipulation or rigging of the outcome of the election results, evidence as argued in the course of the research shows that the primary cause of the conflicts is the weak political institution as demonstrated by the leadership qualities of Mugabe’s Zimbabwe and Kibaki’s Kenya. This led the people to vote them out during the elections.

Although the violence in both countries was seen as post-election crises, the nature of the violence differs in both countries. In Zimbabwe, the violence was unleashed directly more on Tsvangirai and his Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) supporters by Mugabe’s ZANU-PF. After Mugabe lost the first round of elections and unleashed so much terror on Tsvangirai before the second round, the opposition was left with no other choice than to pull out; this paved the way for Mugabe to run against himself and claim a fake victory. In Kenya, the crisis that was more of targeted ethnic violence rather than violent protests intensified and was initially directed against the people of Kikuyu, the community in which Kibaki is a member.

While both the domestic and international community showed concern for the resolution of the conflicts in the two countries, it is clear, however, that while the AU was more directly involved in the conflict resolution in Zimbabwe, the international community participated greatly in the resolution of the Kenyan crisis. It can be argued that the reason behind this is that Kenya is strategically important to Western governments. A crisis in Kenya, for example, has the potential to spill over to the entire Eastern Africa region and the Horn, as the port of Mombasa serves as a crucial or major transport link for neighboring countries and is a strategic gateway to the troubled Middle East. Moreover, the United States considers Kenya a useful ally in its war against terror, especially because the country borders Somalia and Sudan, two countries that have been a thorn in the flesh of the US government for more than a decade (African News, 2008). Zimbabwe is landlocked and has no significant ally among the world’s most powerful nations; it has no oil or other minerals that are of critical importance to the Western world and is on the brink of economic collapse. “A
violent civil war may stir Britain, South Africa or the ‘African Union’ into action (as it really did), but it will barely elicit a yawn from the United States or the European Union” (BBC News, 2008).

Some of the major lessons drawn from the empirical chapters are that: the democratization process has yet to gain ground in Africa. The idea of power-sharing, though a better way forward than political violence, does not speak well of Africa’s democracy. Actually, the Mwai Kibaki–Raila Odinga and now Mugabe–Tsvangirai power-sharing deals were undermining Africa’s democracy. As far as an election contest is concerned, there can never be two winners, but only one winner and then loser(s) as the case may be.

Another lesson is that governance in Africa is still very weak; most of Africa’s leaders have failed the people. They are incapable of providing for the people, the wealth of the nation is being amassed by the few in the governance circle, while the majority of the citizens, particularly the poor, suffer. The lack of the provision of the basic needs of the people have been the major source of ethno-religious and political crisis in most conflict-ridden African states.

Nevertheless the AU, quite unlike its predecessor institution (the Organization of African Unity), has started showing signs of its willingness to bring peace and stability in Africa. It appears to be giving top priority to conflict resolution in Africa, particularly as demonstrated in the Zimbabwe’s case. Yet, it is quite too soon to heave a sigh of relief.

7. Summary, Brief Policy Implication and Conclusion

7.1. Summary

By employing the human needs theory, the research considers one of the most pressing problems confronting the African continent, that is, the issue of conflicts, which has been one of the major impediments to peace and unity. As argued in this paper, analysts, scholars, and commentators of African peace and conflict studies, political history and economy, generally concur that the high incidence of conflicts and internecine civil strife in Africa perhaps presents the largest stumbling block to African unity (Ikejiaku, 2009; Chuma, 2001; Wanyande, 1997). The recent post-election conflicts/crises in both Zimbabwe and Kenya (which are the concentration of this paper) have added to the large number of conflict-ridden African states.

This paper finds that there are many variables or factors that cause or worsen conflicts in Africa. The research highlighted the impact of ethnicity in African conflicts; for example, in Kenya the crisis was more of targeted ethnic violence rather than violent protests; this was intensified and was initially against the people of Kikuyu, the community in which Kibaki is a member.

This paper also identified elections in Africa as impacting on Africa’s conflict, it was the rigging and manipulation of the election results in both Zimbabwe and
Kenya that led to the conflicts. In fact the conflicts are seen as post-election political violence in the two countries. The crisis, for example, erupted after the incumbent President Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner; however, Raila Odinga of the ODM and his supporters alleged “electoral malpractices”, an allegation that was widely confirmed by both domestic and international observers. In Zimbabwe, March 29, 2008 elections were perceived as having dramatically changed Zimbabwe’s political landscape because for the first time since independence in 1980, Robert Mugabe came second in the presidential voting, and the opposition — MDC — won control of parliament. However, as argued in this paper, instead of adhering to the spirit of democracy during the election, Mugabe and his radical supporters employed all available means to foil the real result of the election and claimed victory by force. For example, through a country-wide campaign, they intimidated, repressed and suppressed their opponents and were able to withhold the presidential election result.

The paper equally finds that colonial manipulation of Africa’s boundaries and territoriality is another factor that helps in the understanding of Africa’s conflicts. Scholars argue that one of the possible explanations for the littered political history is the lopsided nature of the post-colonial African state itself. Being modeled after the Westminster model, the African state is, thus, an imported one. (Chuma, 2001, p. 1) cited Admore Kambudzi, an academic at the University of Zimbabwe, who writes that “the colonial powers estimated that it was part of their right to extend political civilisation to Africa, hence the colonial state was established in the image of colonial masters. The constitutional apparatus was essentially drawn from the master.” This artificial drawing of Africa never took into consideration the cultural history and ethnic divergences among the individual communities. In Kenya, for example, during colonial times, Kikuyu people were displaced from their fertile highlands and after independence they were settled outside their traditional areas, especially in the Rift-Valley, where the ethnic Masai had populated originally before Kenya’s colonization by the British. It has been argued that the Kikuyu benefited from the colonial rule and since then has been controlling the government in Kenya more than any other community. Kimeny and Ndung’u (2002) argue that Kikuyu benefited from the colonial policies, increasing land rights and business credit programs after independence, and that this caused antagonism and violent conflict against the Kikuyu from other poor ethnic communities, leading to their expulsion from Masai-land immediately after independence.

This paper also finds that the longstanding conflicts over land fuelled the crisis. In Zimbabwe, the problem associated with the recovery of land rights from the white settlers influenced the ugly situation in Zimbabwe. In Kenya, evidence from the paper shows that at least 3,500 people (but probably a much higher number) were evicted from their homelands, mostly in the Rift-Valley. This was particularly true for those living outside their traditional settlement areas.
While all the above variables undoubtedly impacted on the Zimbabwe and Kenya conflicts, the position of this paper however is that, social injustice resulting from weak governance was the primary source of the conflicts. The paper has demonstrated that governments in Africa have failed the masses by their inability or neglect to meet the basic needs of the people. In Zimbabwe, during the period of the general elections, there was a worsening of both the general welfare and humanitarian situation for the majority of Zimbabweans. This was manifested by food shortages, lack of care services and other necessary social amenities, which impacted negatively on the health and general standard of living of the average Zimbabwean. In Kenya, the burning issue in this particular election was whether Kibaki, who had brought high hopes and expectations in the 2000 election, would be returned as Kenya’s leader by the voters. The reality, as argued in this paper, was that during his tenure in office, the people were disillusioned over his plans for new politics, particularly the lack of improvements in social and economic conditions of the majority, and weak moral political life, especially due to a high level of corruption perpetrated by his regime and growing inequalities, in spite of accelerated economic growth in the country. The masses’ experience of hardship, especially by the poor, actually intensified the violence, since looters struck a number of stores in Mombasa. And some of the worst violence were attacks inspired by ethnicity: acts of outrage at extreme poverty and activities of criminal gangs were common in the slums of Nairobi.

The paper argues that human needs theory is the most informed theoretical explanation for the conflict and conflict resolution in Africa. The theory tends to emphasize the problems on the (domestic) institution of government unable to meet the basic needs of the population as the source of conflicts. As argued, Burton pointed out that aggressions and conflicts are the direct result of some institutions and social norms being incompatible with human needs. He tended to emphasize the failure of existing state systems to satisfy any of these needs, which is the primary source of modern ethno-nationalist struggles. In Zimbabwe, just as in Kenya, the denial or neglect of the basic needs (such as material needs) and neglect of certain identities, (such as the human cost of unemployment to the youths and land rights) by the government of Mugabe and Kibaki, respectively, is the remote source of the conflict. Just as the theory stipulates, when such non-negotiable basic needs are not met, conflict is inevitable.

This paper further examined how the AU has been involved as a conflict resolution institution in Africa by focusing on the recent conflicts in Zimbabwe and Kenya as case studies. This paper finds that both the domestic and international community show concern for the resolution of the conflicts in the two countries. This paper, however demonstrated that while the AU was more directly involved in the conflict resolution in Zimbabwe, the international community participated greatly in the resolution of the Kenyan crisis. The reason behind this is that Kenya is strategically important to Western governments.
7.2. Brief policy implications

The AU can only respond to the resolution of Africa’s conflicts if it can surpass its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Till the date of its demise, the OAU had not carried out a single conflict intervention or resolution exercise to relieve a troubled or conflicting zone, government or populace. Rather, the replaced continental body delegated this task to regional groupings, such the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), whose peacekeeping arm the ECOMOG and SADC intervened in the Kabila’s Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1998.

Against this backdrop, it is imperative that the AU should give highest priority to conflict resolution on the continent. The member states should give the new institution unalloyed and unwavering support; it should also have political and military might in order to command respect. While it is difficult to assume that compromise will be reached in every other conflict, it is crucial that the AU should employ discreetness and rationality in its conflict resolution approach. Furthermore, the AU should have the necessary financial strength and viable resources, in order to help it facilitate the implementation of conflict resolution duties and other relevant roles that will help bring peace and stability to the continent.

7.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper examined the conflicts in Zimbabwe and Kenya, and the roles of AU in conflict resolution. This paper recognized that the conflicts in these two countries have added to the number of conflicting states in the African region and that different factors have led to Africa’s conflicts: ethnicity, election, colonialism, land issue, and unmet human needs. The conclusion of this paper is that the primary source of conflict in Africa is the weak institution of governance and the inability or neglect to meet the needs of the people.

The paper adopted the human needs theory as the most informed theoretical explanation for the conflict and conflict resolution in Africa. The theory tends to emphasize the problems on the (domestic) institution of government unable to meet the basic needs of the population as the source of conflicts. Therefore, unlike other conflict resolution theory and mechanisms, the AU should emphasize the improvement of the governance institution in Africa. All efforts should be in place to compel the government to respond to the wishes of the people, particularly by providing their basic needs. This is the major stipulation of the human needs theory, the theory for understanding the cause of conflict and conflict resolution.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their profound appreciation to the British Institute of Technology & E-commerce (BITE), London for the use of its facilities.
References


