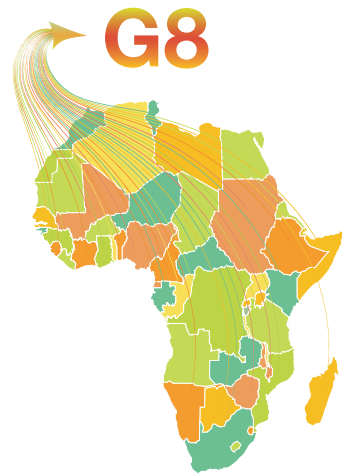


Africa after the Africa Commission:

What priorities for the German G8?



Opinion

May 2007

The future of conflict management in Africa

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'Regional policy frameworks must move beyond the military solution in conflict management and envisage concrete partnerships with a cross-section of actors.'

Several key messages are conveyed by recent conflict and conflict management trends in Africa. The first is that regional and sub-regional organisations are an integral part of the design and implementation of conflict management norms and strategies on the continent, and are becoming increasingly more proactive in this regard. Second, the incidence of large scale armed conflict between and within states, which pose a threat to international peace and security, is on the decline as African states continue on the path of democratic transition and the strengthening of regional norms in the next decade. Third, international policy responses in the area of conflict management are still heavily focused on short term measures, which consist largely of military approaches such as developing the capacity to plan and execute peace support operations at regional and continental levels.

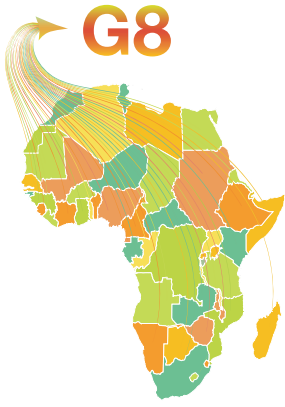
This raises two main issues for African leaders and their partners. The first is the need to sustain the capacity to cope with current conflicts. While international support, not least the Africa Peace Facility provided for by the European Union, has provided the bedrock of the African Union (AU) Mission in Sudan (Darfur), the AU still lacks considerable capacity – both logistical and human resource – to replicate whatever limited success it has achieved in the area of peace-keeping. In part, the absence of a strong civilian component to African peace missions remains a serious gap in a region where this

aspect of conflict management has traditionally been the preserve of the military. This limited capacity is also reflected in the process of operationalising other aspects of the AU peace and security architecture, which correctly envisages multiple tasks and roles for civilians at various levels.

The second issue concerns the capacity to anticipate future conflict and to predict the nature of the terrain that will shape conflict management. Such capacity is crucial if Africa is to effectively prevent conflicts from escalating to the levels seen in the region during the last decade. However, given situations such as Darfur, the attention of peace planners is invariably focused on attaining political stability and creating a secure environment before the longer term goal of security and development.

Yet, a gradual reduction in major armed conflicts in the region suggests that while regional organisations remain pre-occupied with conflicts like Darfur and Somalia, the prevalence of low intensity conflicts in countries where there is neither peace nor war, will present a growing challenge. In these types of terrain, low intensity conflicts are neither large enough to constitute a threat to international peace and security nor can they be ignored without adverse consequences for stability and development. The current trends already point to two features of such terrains, with which conflict managers must grapple. The first is the existence of a plethora of secu-

These Opinions have been written for a high level policy forum bringing together senior DFID and NGO staff, MPs, private sector representatives, Africanists, development academics, and key journalists for discussion on the future of Africa in the run-up to the G8 meeting in Germany (6-8 June). The Forum was held on May 2nd, 2007 in London.



... rity providers other than those sanctioned by the state. The second is a 'youth bulge', a surging youth population creating pressures for jobs, education and health, many of whom survive on the fringes of the state. Both of these features have implications for security and development. Evidence suggests that the pace and scale of democratic transitions in some of these fragile contexts cannot adequately mitigate the adverse impact of the fallouts of these phenomena.

... Regional policy frameworks must move beyond the military solution in conflict management and envisage concrete partnerships with a cross-section of actors in such a way that the efforts of the security and development community can generate maximum effect. Additionally, success will depend on the development of a sound

knowledge base within African institutions. As the present situation suggests, sustaining the capacity to respond to conflict situations requires greater civilian capacity at both field and headquarters, and a residual knowledge base within the organisation in the area of conflict management.

The challenge that confronts African policy makers as well as regional and international organisations is to sharpen and align available policy instruments in order to effectively meet the challenges of this environment. There is a need to look beyond current crises and prevailing circumstances, and to help construct longer-term security and development scenarios for a changed terrain. A multi-track approach is required to deal explicitly with the military interface and involves broadening the constituency of actors.

Resources

For further information on the event, including podcast, video and further downloadable materials, visit the conference websites at:
www.ids.ac.uk/ids/aboutids/events/dsa_policy_forum.html
www.odi.org.uk/events/G8_07/

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