

Cooperation in Conflict Prevention in Rwanda: Which Steps after the War?

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Since the end of the Cold War, the international community has developed various instruments of preventive diplomacy and conflict management. The principal efforts have been concentrated on conflict resolution, while the capabilities of preventing conflicts in vulnerable countries or regions have not been adequately developed. There is now a general consensus, that conflict prevention is much cheaper than conflict management. Strengthening international efforts in this direction will significantly improve the efficiency of international cooperation.

Learning from the Rwandan experience, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), which has been operating for more than thirty years in Rwanda, decided after the genocide to involve itself in conflict prevention. A study was carried out in the framework of the research unit "Development Efficiency of International Cooperation with African Countries" at the Free University of Berlin, in conjunction with the doctorate programme of AfricAvenir, Foundation For Development, International Cooperation And Peace in Douala, Cameroon.

Having discussed the results of the study, the German government presented a summary to the Rwandan government. After this step, GTZ started an experiment for three months, consisting of the insertion of conflict prevention mechanisms within a chosen project of technical cooperation. This was effectively done in the Integrated Rural Development Project of Murambi (DRIM) in the Prefecture of Kigali Rural from April to June, 1997. Conclusions of this experiment were presented last August to the GTZ. The German Agency for Technical Cooperation is now discussing the way to insert progressively mechanisms of conflict prevention in all its projects in Rwanda and to achieve this in the next three years.

In this way, conflict prevention should become a permanent companion of every GTZ-development project in Rwanda. We were convinced of the necessity of this method because we experienced in the Rwandan case that technical and financial cooperation alone were not sufficient to prevent conflicts. Otherwise, Rwanda, that was massively supported by donor countries for more than thirty years could never have gone through the kind of genocide it experienced. During the crisis, many Rwandan counterparts in several development projects participated in the organisation of the genocide, killed colleagues and used the project infrastructures for the mass killing. In a road - building project for example, heavy machines were carried to Goma and used to build infrastructures in the refugee camps, and the international community paid large sums to the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide, who transported these machines to Goma and offered themselves as private firms. They bought

arms with the money, organised military incursions into Rwanda and held back as hostages in the camps those refugees who had expressed their desire to return.

In this concrete case, international technical cooperation contributed unwittingly to the financial support of those responsible for the Rwandan massacres. For this reason we argue that it is necessary to build up mechanisms of conflict prevention within on-going development projects. The experience of conflict prevention in the Integrated Rural Development of Murambi (DRIM) - Project in the rural area of Kigali is a case in point.

Integrating a dialogue forum in a technical project

In this project, we divided our target groups in three categories. The first one was our own group of conflict prevention. This group consisted of two fellows of the AfricAvenir doctorate programme and myself as foreign actors, four Rwandan counterparts including Hutus and Tutsis, namely a female journalist, an old wise man, a playwright, and a young political adviser to a rural city council. The second group was that of the project management of DRI Murambi, including the German project manager, car drivers and the maid. The third group was composed of all target groups of the DRI-Murambi-project.

The conflict prevention group underwent an internal training. The objective was for them to understand the purpose of conflict prevention and to discuss the main issues concerning the Rwandan society, past and present. This first group had the task of building up a dialogue structure within the DRI-Murambi management group. Several meetings were organised between both groups and critical questions were raised, namely:

- a. Why had the DRI Murambi group never before discussed what happened before, during and after the genocide?
- b. Why did everybody just carry on working, ignoring what had happened or talking about these problems only in private?

Other questions that arose were:

- a. What is wrong with the Rwandan society in general?
- b. What is wrong with the structures of the Rwandan state?
- c. What is wrong with the structures of the Rwandan civil society?
- d. What is wrong with the personality of the Rwandan citizen in general?
- e. What is the background of the Hutu-Tutsi confrontation?
- f. How old is this conflict?

Yet other follow - up questions consisted of:

- a. What could be done to avoid a repetition of this kind of crisis?
- b. What could be the concrete contribution of the DRI Murambi project in preventing conflicts in the country?
- c. What could be the contribution of every participant in the project management group?

To generate credible answers to these issues, dialogue sessions were arranged among various groups, namely: with the DRI Murambi management group, the old wise men and women, women groups composed of association leaders, former exiles, returnees, survivors, raped

women, widows, etc., After that, the discussion went on with groups of young people composed of young heads of families saddled with several orphans, school and university youths, jobless youths, non-educated youths etc. The other group was the intellectuals, composed of people in the government, in the city council, teachers, priests, etc.

By doing this, we wanted the management group of DRI Murambi to be confronted with the diverse realities of the country and the sensitivities of the population through the search for answers to fundamental questions. The aim was also to make the management group of DRI Murambi modify its approach in working with the target groups on the hills.

The next step for the conflict prevention group was to go to the hills together with the management group of DRI Murambi and discuss separately with every target group there. We found other resource persons on the hills, i.e. old wise people, women, intellectuals, young people, etc. We brought them together with the different groups working with DRI Murambi. We raised the questions in the concerned groups in greater detail as they concerned the situation on the hills.

There was so much doubt about the workability of this approach, that an old man went to the mayor of Rutongo and asked if the mayor knew that there was a group asking pertinent and troubling questions on the hills, and if the mayor had given the permission to ask questions of this kind. The mayor reassured him that our work was legal and should be supported.

Opening a dialogue on problems in their society

The reaction of the Rwandans in the conflict prevention group, in the DRI Murambi management group and in the different target groups on the hills was that they were learning a lot every day about their own society, about the stupidity inherent in the alleged differences between them, about the problems and possible concrete solutions they may apply where they work or live. The groups on the hills were astonished when some of these questions were loudly asked, when they understood how incredible the manipulation machine works and they asked the conflict prevention group to come again and again. The DRI Murambi management group is now thinking of a new approach with the different target groups and will maintain the inserted dialogue structure in their development project.

I wanted to give this example of the possible insertion of mechanisms of conflict prevention in a technical development project. But this is just one aspect of improving international capabilities for preventing conflicts. In conclusion, I would like to give some indications of the way I believe international cooperation could improve African and international capabilities in conflict prevention in the Great Lakes region.

Lessons learnt

First of all, there are fundamental questions that we have to answer:

- a. What is wrong with the African societies in the Great Lakes region right now ?
- b. Why are so many things not going well there?
- c. What happened with the reference values of these African societies ?
- d. Why do so many conflicts turn into violent confrontations ?
- e. Who is able to give the right answers to these questions ?

f. From where may credible solutions emerge?

These questions should be asked and answered by the African societies themselves first, then by the international community. In the 1950s and early 1960s, certain fundamental questions were asked by the African population and elite, and the resulting concerted action led to independence. The trauma of being excluded from taking decisions on one's own destiny imposed since slavery and colonialism seemed to have come to an end. But in most cases, the struggle for independence failed to produce leaders with vision and sufficiently independent from foreign powers. In many countries, puppets of former colonial powers seized power. This group of leaders in most African countries chose the way of manipulating the population in one party systems or other structures, instead of educating it by allowing debates forbidden since slavery and colonialism. The post-colonial period dominated by the Cold War antagonism stopped the emergence of a debate on fundamental questions in African societies, and the African elite was more interested in the manipulation of the population for the purpose of capturing or maintaining power. There was no real place for civic education and for participation of the civil society in charting the destiny of the nation.

Many African governments even today are still not interested in the participation of the people in their own affairs. Even when debates are officially allowed, they remain largely superficial. They are often meant to serve as a facade, to present a pseudo-democratic face of the regime, but without starting a genuine democratic process. The main objective of the African elite since independence remains clear: capturing or maintaining the monopoly of political power. Many of the strongly Western-centred African elite are the counterparts of international institutions. They know how to obtain support even through NGOs and capacity building programmes and they perpetuate their main aim of monopolising power through these structures. When a conflict arising from the struggle for power among the elite occurs, the rest of the population is manipulated or hoodwinked into these elite battles. Only in rare cases is the population able to contain the conflict of opposing factions of the country's elite. If this structure of relations is maintained, it will be very difficult to prevent conflicts, because the civil society does not really exist or is not powerful enough to arbitrate the power match between the battling factions. The only possible outcome is the imposition of the will of one faction over the other, with sometimes hundreds of thousands of deaths, or a long and highly expensive process of conflict management by the international community.

Because of this situation, I suggest a framework of seven guidelines the international community could support as main measures of conflict prevention in the Great Lakes region.

1. Empower structures for discussion at various levels to reconcile the citizens with their own past and present and enable the civil society to take active part in the main decisions of the state and to control efficiently governmental affairs. Particular attention should be paid to the traditional society and to the contribution of the old wise men and women in conflict prevention and peace management. A fruitful dialogue should be installed between these old wise people and the national and international actors.
2. Encourage the governments of the region to promote independent institutions supporting this vital debate for building up of modern nations and enabling their citizens to ask loudly fundamental questions in the framework of private and state institutions. This should be regarded to as a fundamental right of the people. In this context, the international community should develop new mechanisms of empowering structures of the civil society without being eventually blocked by a national repressive state.

3. Promote education for peace and conflict prevention in both public and private schools and universities, but also through critical foundations, such as religious institutions and NGOs working on this field.
4. Promote media capabilities and modern information technologies in building up main infrastructures and in educating journalists working in both the state and private sectors as well as various groups within the civil society.
5. Promote the regional integration and cooperation not only at governmental levels and through state institutions, but also by empowering regional private businesses and common actions of the civil societies and MPs in the region as a main measure of conflict prevention.
6. Promote the education of the armed forces and the police as the main body for the protection of the nation and citizens, as opposed to their main role since independence which has consisted in the repression of their own population. The human rights aspect should play a key role in this education. Particular attention should be paid to the demobilisation of soldiers after civil wars, particularly young men and children and to their reintegration into the civil society.
7. Incorporate mechanisms of conflict prevention and peace building within all the projects of international cooperation in the region.

By implementing these guidelines, we should be aware of some resistance within a given country. This could emerge from old habits of just obeying the orders coming from the top, not participating in the general effort for development because of a lack of interest or involvement, or because repressive institutions are not willing to involve the population in development affairs. But we also should be aware of the fact that without involving the population in conflict prevention and in the decision making process for their survival, it will be very difficult in the actual context, especially in Africa, to achieve the goal of curative development.

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