

The Challenges of Europe-Africa Relations: *An Agenda of Priorities*

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African Capacities of intervention, mediation and conflict resolution: Civil Society Intervention in Ituri, Bunia, DRC.

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Lessons from the field

Opening remarks

The following account is extracted from a report of a peacebuilding workshop held in August 2003 for members of the Commission of Prevention and Verification¹ of the Special Interim Administration of Ituri², in Bunia, Northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The workshop was part of the UN, EU and Civil society efforts to bring back normalcy in this part of the country. The presentation is structured as follows:

- I. Introduction: Tangibles and Intangibles.
- II. A summary of the context
- III. The interventions:
 - a) the EU and UN interventions
 - b) The Civil Society Intervention.
- IV. The highlights and recommendation (in bold)

¹ The Prevention and Verification Commission (PVC) is one of the commissions of the Special Interim Administration. Interestingly, this commission is presided by the MONUC representative in Bunia, Mr Alpha Sow

² The Special Interim Administration is a consensual all-inclusive civilian administration set into place to replace Ugandan appointed authorities who had completely lost the support of majority of population in Ituri. The Interim Special Administration was a collective initiative of the UN mission in DRC, the government of DRC, the government of Uganda and representatives of all communities in Ituri.

I. Introduction

In most violent conflicts in Africa contain two dimensions that need special consideration: the *tangibles* and the *intangibles*. The tangibles refer to all what is objectively measurable. They include the visible actors and perceived concrete issues (usually sharing of power and resources) that oppose them, the physical effects or consequences of violence and the kind of processes that are put into place to “resolve” the conflict. The failure of the formal structures (powers, laws and regulations) to adequately respond to competing demands in the society tends to be taken responsible for generating the crisis. The intangibles refer to what is often hard to “objectively” measure. They include anonymous actors, the masses that are often reduced to statistics; the “real” issues often related to identities, perceptions, self-esteem or recognition, etc. and less visible or publicized informal processes that lead to reconstruction of relationships. People’s failure to maintain and preserve qualitative relationships is taken responsible of disrupting the social balance between the conflicting parties.

On one hand, in their conflict “resolution” interventions, state actors, international community, and UN bodies tend to put their weight behind processes that focus more on the tangibles than intangibles. A part from humanitarian assistance, peace processes target the visible and “legitimized” actors. Indeed, these actors are legitimized by the International conflict “resolution” processes because peace needs to be done with them. Their legitimacy and their negotiating powers are often drawn from their harming capacity, their ability to destabilize “law and order”. The attraction to focus on such actors is based on the assumption that by engaging them and because their “high profile” and their decision making power, the chances are high to reach quick results such as peace truces or political reconciliation through sharing of power. This, in turn would then pave the way to the return of stability and the rule of law often achieved through hurriedly organized electoral process. It is precisely the expectation of quick results and the aura of credibility that accompanies the interveners that makes the tangibles very attractive. Focusing on tangibles is also attractive because of the existence of well established instruments of intervention (arbitration, judiciary settlement, negotiation, good offices, mediation, conciliation or inquiry, settlement under the auspices of United Nations Organisation) and the capacity to assess progress made. Once the interests of well identified actors (not necessarily legitimate) are taken care of in the power sharing

framework, there is likelihood to stability and “peace”. The scenario is always as follows: “cease-fire-peace accord-power sharing-government of national unity-elections-peace and stability”. Enormous resources are allocated to these processes and all those engaged keenly follow up on the process.

On the other hand, state and international actors tend to ignore the intangibles. The actors are large in numbers and often unorganized. Their destabilizing power, on short-term, is perceived as insignificant and hence they don't qualify as actors at the negotiation table. Though legitimate they are not internationally legitimized. The instruments of those intervening with intangibles are not codified and classified or even known or/and understood by state and international actors. The timeframe is not clear and the capacity to assess results on a short term is difficult. Very few resources are allocated and very limited media attention is given to processes that aim at addressing the intangibles.

However there will never be lasting peace if issues of relationships often embedded in a long past history are not addressed. Otherwise there will only be a postponement of a lasting solution and a projection of issues in the future. Since the famous South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there have been what is needed is a two-tract intervention combining appropriate responses to both tangibles and intangibles. The integration of intangibles, not in ad hoc manner, will ensure that the crisis and its effects and root causes are addressed in a comprehensively. It is encouraging to observe that, since the famous South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there are efforts to start looking into these intangibles more keenly. The South African model has now been followed by a number of African countries in post-war or post dictatorship period. Unfortunately each situation will dictate its own appropriate healing process and codification or systematization of reconciliation processes will always pose a challenge.

Many peace organizations, including NPI-Africa are operating in this difficult area of nurturing qualitative relationships for a sustainable peace. They believe that political reconciliation is insufficient to bring about durable peace. It needs to be accompanied and integrated into a well thought through social reconciliation. The inclusion of peacebuilding into the Cotonou Agreement and other recent cooperation and development frameworks are a recognition that

the focus on tangibles alone is not sufficient to bring about durable peace that is indispensable for development. It is a combination tangibles and intangibles that hold the highest potential to bring about not only stability but also lasting peace.

II. The context

Ituri in the northeastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has attracted the attention of the international community by the level atrocities committed by parties, both national and international, involved in the conflict in this part of the country. Reports and evidences of mass killings, mutilations, cannibalism and extensive destruction of properties and other social infrastructures led to an unprecedented humanitarian calamity. The condition was further exacerbated by the pooling out of the Ugandan army as part of the Lusaka Cease-fire Agreement and subsequent bilateral accords between Uganda and the DRC government. The Hema and the Lendu communities were disputing the control of the town and were involved in killings. The situation prompted an equally unprecedented fast and strong international French-led European Union military intervention, to stop the killings and prevent this humanitarian tragedy.

The interventions

a) The French led EU military intervention and the UN peace keeping forces.

Under the name of “Operation Artemis” the French-led international operation, was brought in to maintain order and prevent further bloody clashes between the two major conflicting communities the Hema and the Lendu. The town of Bunia, though de facto divided into two with each side controlled by one of the two groups and their allies, is officially demilitarized, (no gun in sight consign) and monitored by the MONUC (United Nations Mission for Congo) and the French-led EU force.

For the majority of Congolese in Bunia, the French-led military operation was salutary. The arsenal displayed in Bunia alone is impressive both in terms of quantity and quality of fire power. This unusual determination of the international community has sent mix signals to the protagonists of the Ituri war and specifically to their leaders. Even though the “Operation Artemis/Mamba” in Bunia is legally a European Union operation, some of the leaders of local armed groups see in it a reproduction of the “Operation Turquoise” carried out in 1994 in

Rwanda during the genocide. The operation was then interpreted by one group as an operation that came to the rescue of the defeated Rwandan army. In relation to the situation in Bunia, one community felt that the French came to the rescue of the enemy they were about defeating.

For others, the European military operation came just on time to stop another genocide in the Great Lakes Region. The operation also came to stop the confusion the Ugandan and Rwandan armies have created in the whole region in creating and dismantling allies with one or the other militia group. The intervention also helped to cool down the tempers of the rival communities while at the same time opening doors to dialogue among all the factions' leaders and the government of Kinshasa. They perceived in this military intervention the "hand of God". Still others feel the international intervention is not altruist. They think this intervention is linked to the existing and newly discovered resources that abound in this part of the Congo. They specifically talked about oil and "green wood".

All in all, for many Congolese and all peace lovers, the enormous presence of international forces and the different layers of authority in Bunia have been very helpful in reducing the levels of violence and maintaining order in the town of Bunia. The move by the transitional government to negotiate the future of the leaders of armed groups in Kinshasa is also an encouraging step toward bringing back normalcy in Ituri. However it was obvious that people's relationships are still very bad and need special attention. The town of Bunia is de facto divided into two: One side is controlled/dominated by the Hema and the other by the Lendu. A Lendu caught in Hema controlled area is stoned to death and the same apply to any Hema in Lendu controlled area. Abductions, assassinations, looting, and intimidations are still practiced, especially at night.

People's worries

They articulated two major worries they anticipate:

- 1) The departure of the French-led Artemis/Mamba operation that is ending on the 1st of September 2003. This operation is meant to be replaced by the *Mission des Nations Unies au Congo, MONUC* (UN Mission in D.R.Congo), the UN peace keeping force. People are suspicious about the ability of the MONUC force to deal effectively with the ruthless armed groups who are virtually controlling portions of

the Bunia town and elsewhere in Ituri. This worry is founded in the recent sad experience (in May 2003) when the Ugandan forces were withdrawing from the town as part of the peace deal between the Government of Kinshasa and that of Kampala. The *Union des Patriotes Congolais (UPC)*, a party said to be supported by the Rwandan government invested the town and, in the process, committed gross human rights abuses in the presence of an inactive MONUC forces. The UN force did not have the mandate to intervene militarily and helplessly witnessed the massacre of innocent civilians.

However, in a private meeting, a commander of the Artemis/Mamba operation ensured us that the Bangladeshi, Pakistanis and Uruguayan forces who will take over from the European military force, are determined to effectively deal with any vague impulse to violence wherever it will come from. He added this force contrary the previous one has a larger mandate, a stronger presence and will be equally well equipped to carry out their mission. In effect, they will be operating under the Chapter VII of the UN and their number has been increased to reach more than 4,000 troops. In addition this UN force will be deployed beyond the town of Bunia to pacify the rest of the Ituri region.

- 2) The second worry is the role of Ugandan and Rwandan governments in the new Congolese peace deal. Many of the participants are still accusing these two countries for the continued violence outside Bunia, and their continued interest to access and exploit Congolese resources. The common Congolese have lost trust in the leadership of Rwanda and Uganda. They don't believe these two countries have really withdrawn from Congo. Rumours of a "third war" against the current transitional government have been circulating in eastern Congo with Rwanda being accused of massing troops in some places in the North and South Kivu Provinces across its borders. A certain "commandant Jerome" has been identified as one of those who continue to cause havoc in Ituri on behalf of one of these two countries.

Civil Society should have the responsibility of assuring the communities by offering accurate information to cement trust and confident in the peace process. If such rumors turn to be true, it will be the responsibility of the civil society and that of the transitional government to alert EU

members and urge them to put pressure on Rwanda to respect the peace accord and avoid further destabilization of the region.

This could be integrated into the Early Warning and Early Response system, a role that the civil society can provide in the partnership with state and international actors in emergency situations.

b) The Civil Society intervention

The London-based Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), the Nairobi-based Africa Initiatives Program (AIP) and the South African Centre for the Study of Violence and Réconciliation (CSVSR) requested NPI-Africa³ to assist in training members of the “Prevention and Verification Commission” of the Interim Special Administration. The training is part of the European Union funded efforts to consolidate national and international peace efforts in the volatile area of Bunia. The training took place in Bunia, the Ituri region main town under heavy UN military presence guaranteeing the security of the participants.

The overall objective of the training was to build the capacity of the members of the CPV in conflict transformation and peace building in Ituri. Part of building their capacity included to (1) iron their differences as members coming from different ethnic groups currently involved in bloody fighting, (2) forge a common vision, (3) agree on a minimum agenda for concrete actions and (4) define a timeframe for implementation.

Participants are members of the commission of (PVC). They are drawn from all the ethnic groups of Ituri. The Special Interim Administration non-members of the PVC sent five representatives to the workshop. There were 36 participants in total. Only four women were among them. Three of the four ladies left for Kinshasa on the second day to participate in the negotiations between leaders of armed groups and the transitional government. The armed groups’ delegation was accompanied by the “president” of the Interim Special Administration of Ituri, a well respected lady. There were also some observers representing international organizations involved *in humanitarian assistance*.

How was it done?

The four-day training was structured as follows:

³ The Nairobi Peace Initiative – Africa (NPI-Africa) is a Nairobi-based pan African peace resource organization, specialized in peacebuilding, conflict transformation and reconciliation on the continent of Africa. In 2004, NPI-Africa will celebrate its 20th Anniversary.

The first day was set for exploring the root causes of the current conflict in Ituri. It involved group works and plenary presentations and discussions. The groups were formed of participants from different ethnic background. The discussions in plenary helped to create a consensual understanding of the context and offered a highlight of the magnitude of the issues. More specifically the participants realized their personal and collective responsibility in the making of the current situation, as well as, identifying the contribution of external forces in the creation or exacerbation of the crisis.

The second day was invested in continuing to understand the context of conflicts in Ituri. The focus was to deeply discover the magnitude of human and material destruction occasioned by the conflict. A special emphasis was put on how Women, Men, Boys, Girls, Children and Disabled were affected by the violence in Ituri. This conflict effects-segregation was helpful in appreciating how different groups were differently affected by violence and how best response strategies would accommodate the special needs of these categories. Some tools for analysis were developed including a working definition encompassing the different stages of conflict.

On the third day, participants were exposed on various tools of personal transformation as well as working through the spectrum of responses to conflicts evaluating each of these mechanisms in reference to their level of mutual participation in search for solution. Reconciliation was identified as the highest level of mutual participation in the search for solution and hence could easily serve as a long-term unifying vision for the CPV. In a simulation, the participants constructed an emotional image of Bunia and Ituri look like today.

Since the fourth day was designed to include the closure ceremony the training was supposed to end early enough to accommodate this ceremony. But the participants negotiated with the organizers to make it a full working day and postponed the closure ceremony on the fifth day, Sunday at 2:00 PM. The day was devoted to explore the concept to reconciliation and how this could be achieved in the context of DRC at large and Ituri in particular. Through a role play, participants were able to understand the challenges of reconciliation in DRC, especially the need to integrate the four pillars of reconciliation: truth, justice, peace and mercy. Participants benefited from the presentation on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission experience. Participants could see the strengths and weaknesses of such Commission in the

perspective of its application to the DRC context. This day was also devoted to design follow up activities. Participants explored what activities they could launch in the next six months in order to increase trust among and between communities as well as bringing back normalcy to Ituri at large and Bunia in particular. This was done in group work.

On the fifth day again, the participants came to negotiate with the organizers to include in the program two hours prior to the closing ceremony, for more input and possible clarifications. The facilitation team agreed to offer this opportunity before the closing ceremony. The input focused on alerting the participants on the levels of engagement and the capacity the participants have to handle each level. These levels included dealing with (1) crisis that is an immediate task and that needs specialization in handling humanitarian work and may need enormous resources, (2) structural issues such as land, that need to be dealt with on long-term basis in order to promote peace and stability in the country at large and Ituri in particular, (3) improving the process of decision making that should promote large participation of the concerned communities and other stakeholders, and finally (4) the quality of relationships that need to be nurtured and improved in order to pass up the prevailing exclusionist behavior embedded in the negative perceptions constructed over the years. This input showed how the current crisis in Ituri is symptomatic of system's inability to deal with issues of people's demands and how it is deeply rooted in the deterioration of people's relationships. It also was showed how, when divided, people are vulnerable to external manipulation.

Immediate out comes of the training

1. There was a display of enormous interest in learning the tools of peace building and conflict transformation on the part of participants. Their capacity to absorb new concepts and frameworks was very high. Some participants have done thorough studies, without any external support, of some of the consequences of the crisis (e.g. drogue, trauma, etc.). Their studies were supported by with clear statistics and documented facts and illustrations. The participation was impressive. The fact that participants negotiated twice the extension of the training was an eloquent indicator that, beyond the interest of learning, they have a strong desire to address the prevailing issues of violence in Ituri. They expressed the need to see the same training be

organized for all the members of the Interim Special Administration as well as extended to members and leadership of armed groups. They confessed that the workshop helped them change their perspective about “the other”.

The local capacities are untapped by the international interventions. During the workshop and the many interviews we carried out with international agencies in Bunia town, one realizes the high level of suspicion international agents have toward the locals. Procedural issues and misperceptions toward local capacities are some of the obstacles to integrating local participation into international initiatives.

2. A Six months initial plan of action that includes minimum trust building activities was articulated by the participants.

Some quotes:

(1) *“I am a Bira. At the beginning of the workshop, a Hema friend of mine refused to shake my hand as I was greeting him. Now, at the end of the workshop, he is the one who came to greet me in the morning! I see an enormous change happening in his behavior thanks to the training.”*

(2) *I am a member of UPC (Union de Patriotes Congolais) close to Hema community. I have been in many such as Burundi and Kenya for peace and conflict training ahead to the Sun City Inter-Congolese Dialogue. All what they told us was to remain “neutral” and impartial ...but they never told us how to remain “neutral” and impartial. I have learned it in this training, I am now well equipped with practical tools for my peace work.”*

(3) *I am a Lendu. We have been silenced in all debates in this region. Nobody has ever advocated for us. This training has spoken for us and it has also spoken for “them”. We are now on the right path to work for peace. I am angry against the organizers who did not think to invite all the members of the Interim Special Administration in Ituri to participate to this training. The impact could have been even higher than one could think.”*

Observations and recommendations

1. The training as well as the informal meetings outside the training revealed a strong desire shared by all the ethnic groups to stop the killings and work for peace. They have all become conscious that none of them would be able to dominate the others by force and that all would require to compromise for a lasting peace to exist. They for example came to the realization that they were losing many of their young people

including children in the killings and counter killings. The leadership of one of the groups is made of the very young people who have dropped schools to join the war. They shared with the facilitation team that they were yearning to go back to school or university to continue their studies. They pledged to demobilize children and send them back to school. And they were looking for support to open vocational centers for demobilized combatants who can no longer join the formal school. It was sad to notice the quasi total absence of adult people in the leadership of this particular group. The youth have literally taken over the responsibility of adults including that of the traditional chiefs and elders. This is a strong indicator of the current breakdown of the traditional institutions that had, in the past, always played the role of guarantors of social cohesion. The power of the gun seems to have eluded that of wisdom.

The civil society members are often powerless when demands such as that formulated by these young militia leaders are forwarded to them. Such demands are unique entry-point for a participatory process for a government plan for disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants including child soldiers. To sustain peace momentum concrete actions need to be taken in response to these specific needs of this group.

2. If the leadership in some of the groups tends to give the Ituri conflict a perception of being a youth affair, there are other groups whose leadership and membership are made of a cream of intellectuals from Congolese universities and abroad. In fact for many, the war in eastern DRC in general and in Ituri in particular, is basically an intellectual-led war. This belief is indeed based on the fact that most of the rebel leadership is formed of former students of the University of Kisangani. Many of these former Kisangani University students are native of the troubled region of Ituri. Unfortunately the presence of these illuminated people at the heads of different rebel movements did not reduce the ruthless way they conducted their so-called rebellion. Many of these leaders have their hands full of blood of many innocent lives.
3. There would be a need to set up follow-up mechanisms to sustain the generated interest of the participants in dealing, non-violently, with conflicts in Ituri. The process needs a well designed accompaniment plan, that will aim at continued building the

capacity of the *Commission de Prevention et de Verification* as well as expanding to other critical actors such as the armed groups and other members of the civil society. This is a process a gradual inclusiveness in the transformation process.

The civil society is often confronted with the task of sustaining the interest and energies generated in a workshop set-up. Without adequate resources, the accompaniment of more than willing conflicting parties to embark on the journey of transformation will always be hampered.

4. The accompaniment process should urgently be set into place to support and sustain at local level the already achieved peace momentum at national. This accompaniment needs to be harmonized with and complement international community peace efforts including the UN. For example how to prepare the communities to assist in the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers and former combatants, or how to contribute in the psycho-social accompaniment for women, men and children traumatized by horrific levels of violence that prevailed during the war, etc?

To urgently put into place complementary processes to the UN and international community peace efforts one needs to lay down strategies for trust building activities that will allow interactions between the two communities and their allies. This process could be imbedded into the newly set “Commission Vérité et Réconciliation”, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission set by the transitional government or any other peace framework that is required to be quickly developed by concerned peace organizations in DRC and elsewhere in Africa and abroad.

Up to now there is no channel or framework that would allow lodging such ideas into the mainstream of the transitional government reconciliation strategy.

5. To set into place an credible state apparatus including the National Army, the National Police and strong Judiciary system to stop in a permanent way any vague impulse to violence and prepare the ground to judge all those responsible for mass killings, tortures and rapes. The government of DRC needs to be felt right now and people need to see the government representatives working hand in hand with the international/UN force. This will then ensure every body’s safety and that Ituri is not

under international protectorate. The government presence will also ensure that, on a long term basis, issues of justice and impunity will be addressed by responsible government institutions. This will pave the way for the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation of combatants including the child soldiers. Unless the quality of community relationships is worked out there will be no prospect for lasting peace. Currently the international peace keeping force is facing a dilemma: Whenever they apprehend a suspect they have to release him/her simply because there is not functioning prison or detention infrastructure or any judiciary system meant to deal with the case. In their operations they have only three options: kill and burry, wound and take to Medecins Sans Frontieres or catch-and-release!

A plan of action generated by conflicting Hema and Lendu and other Ituri communities intends to improve their relationships by engaging in potentially trust building activities. The challenge is to make those with resources understand that this is a golden opportunity that allows communities to rethink their relationship and start imagining new mutually acceptable future. It is through such process that they start addressing the root causes of their conflict and thus opening opportunities for durable peace. This obviously a long term process while the EU/UN interventions are often short term oriented. “The civil society is a long distance runner while states and inter-states actors are short distance runners.”

Concrete suggestions

1. There should be at national and regional levels, **forums** that accommodate governments and intergovernmental bodies and civil society relations, concerning areas of common interests such as human rights, peace and security, reconciliation process, etc. So far there is no existing framework that regularly brings the civil society and government representatives together. These forums would be composed with representatives of the specialized (issue focused) civil society representatives, members of a special commission of the parliament, representatives of the government, and representatives of the judiciary. Members representing the civil society would be democratically designated following clear pre-established criteria of selection. This will assist in avoiding, on one hand, unnecessary competition, manipulation, opportunism, and incompetence; and, on the other, assure credibility and legitimacy of those

representing the civil society in the forums. Depending on the matters discussed specialized members of the civil society will represent non-state actors in these forums. For example, if discussions are focusing on peacebuilding and security, civil society representatives from the selected peace organizations would attend the forum for a meaningful input.

2. Capacity building is needed for all those involved in the partnership. The civil society needs to educate members of state and inter-states on participatory methodologies and techniques of community mediation and peacebuilding. The civil society on the hand needs to build its capacity in understanding how operate state institutions and how to interact with them.