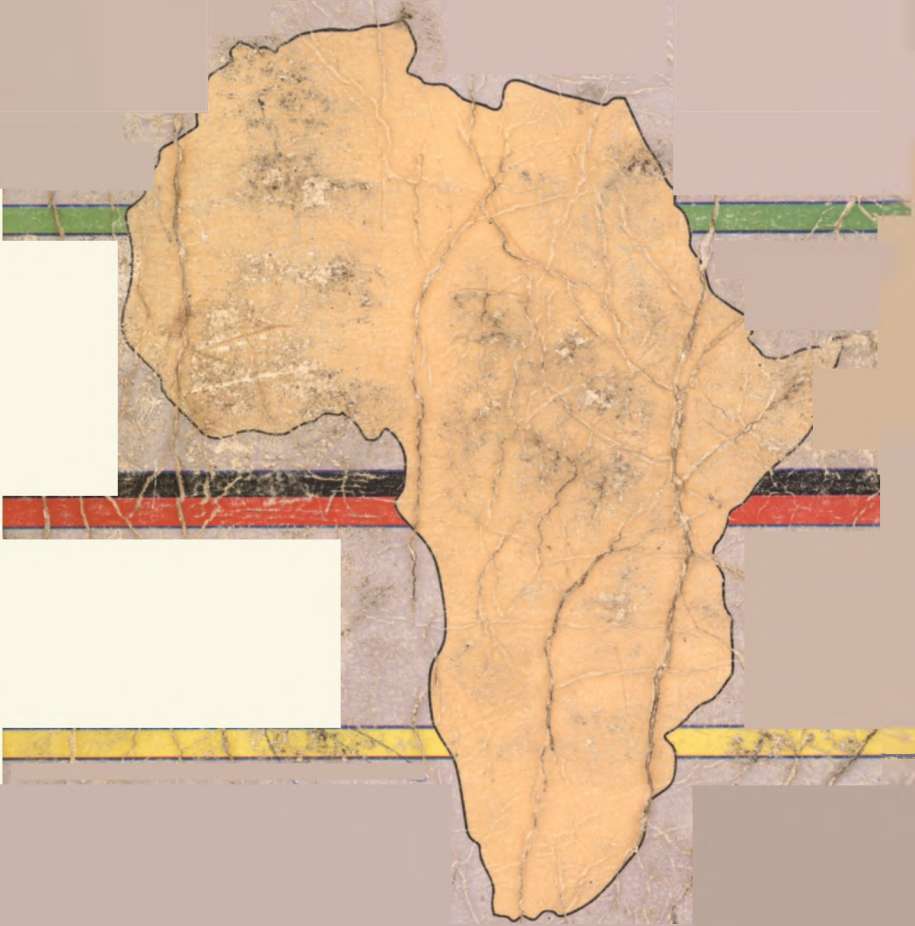


# **The Human Factor Approach to Development in Africa**



**Edited by**  
**G. Chivaura      and      Claude G. Mararike**

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Vimbai G. Chivaura and Claude G. Mararike



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## The Human Factor and Conflict in Post-Cold War Africa

Admore M. Kambudzi

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### Introduction

The underlying causes of armed conflict in post-Cold War Africa are essentially those of Human Factor (HF) decay. Since independence in the 1960s, and throughout the Cold War, degraded political conditions such as dictatorship, military rule, corruption, and imported cultures emerged on the continent. Political decay and leadership pathology are, therefore, at the centre of conflict and disorder in Africa. The need to reconstitute a healthy political HF in Africa would, therefore, be top of the agenda to resolve conflict and political tyranny.

And, as far as reconstituting the political HF in Africa is concerned, we can resort to Africa's own past for models. Africa practised political and economic democracy from time immemorial and created appropriate conditions for sustaining human life through viable socio-economic and cultural institutions prior to white colonial rule.

In Botswana, for instance, social institutions had reached advanced stages of development by the seventeenth century (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1990: 94). Indigenous political institutions such as the Kgotla (tribal assembly) or dikgosi (royal advisers), had been firmly established and continue to function to this day. These institutions interlocked in such a way that they provided checks and restraints on the power of leaders and safeguarded the freedom and security of members of the community.

The Munhumutapa Empire that survived from the 14th to the 19th century and spread over the land between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers, display a highly developed political form. The empire's disintegration at the turn of the nineteenth century, in the face of the oncoming colonization, demonstrated suffocation of indigenous political institutions on the African continent. This change marked the beginning of dispossession by colonialism and dependence on European institutions on the African continent. Colonial rule brought its own political culture and imposed it on Africans. HF decay in African culture and social institutions set in. Concerning the damage of colonial rule on indigenous political forms, some analysts point out that the final solution to the political and social crisis in Africa today lies in restoring Africa's institutions and their control.

It is indisputable that no people can lead a fuller life within an environment controlled and dominated by exotic conditions. What needs to be done is to reclaim Africa's political HF. This requires mental re-orientation and recourse to the wisdom sourced from our history and cultural heritage. Powerful secrets remain untapped

from the wisdom of our ancestors, while imported political cultures continue to play havoc with African lives and values.

The physical and spiritual well being of our people continue to be undermined by wars generated by conflict over foreign interests. Brutal wars between our people are characterised as tribal to blur the criminal nature of foreign engineering.

### **Human factor thesis**

Properly understood, the HF has direct bearing on peace, progress, development or even conflict. People constitute a basic resource in the dynamic process of material development. The HF has been defined as 'the spectrum of personality characteristics and other dimensions of human performance that enable social, economic and political institutions to function, and remain functional over time' (Adjibolosso, 1995: 4). The soundness of institutions, their functional capacity and continuity depends on human attitudes, aptitudes and output. In practical terms, the HF concerns human beings capable of creating and stimulating appropriate institutions and living conditions in society.

Changes need people to make them happen, that is to say, people who have been prepared and trained to develop and manage organizations and institutions to bring about required outcomes. A good tobacco crop, for example, comes from a farmer trained to find the appropriate soil, moisture, weather conditions and provide constant human care to the crop.

Similarly, democracy, peace and human rights are not natural gifts, but conditions necessitated by human beings who have acquired the necessary HFs of responsibility, reliability, accountability and commitment to human progress and development.

In view of the political turmoil characteristic of many African states today, we can no longer dispute that independence came at a time when African political leaders had not acquired the necessary HF characteristics to run modern states. Colonial rule was largely despotic and did not teach Africans these characteristics. Political leaders became life presidents and despots who ruled according to their whims. The ruled were slow to realize that democracy, peace and respect for human rights were essential for Africa's progress. It was, again, not realized that democrats, peace-makers and human rights activists were more fundamental to Africa's development than state rulers and presidents with large cabinets and fat civil services. Since independence, most African states suffered accumulation of regressive institutions, decadent political cultures and despotic rule.

### **Contextualising African conflicts**

Peace and human rights thrive in conditions where democracy exists. Conflict is the antithesis of democracy and denial of peace and human rights. It promotes political killings, death squads, war mongers and warlords (Mazrui, 1984:194).

The causes of conflict are always potential; but whether they become conflict or not depends on the HF endowments of parties concerned. A people whose ideology inclines towards peace and human rights are less likely to generate conflict.

Cold War conflicts were the result of superpower struggle for military might and ideological control. Current internal African conflicts need to be understood in this context of superpower global control. Casper Odegi has insisted that we cannot afford the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to remain a forum for African heads of state to meet once a year, talk to each other, banquet and jet back home while senseless wars and genocides go on in member states as is happening in Rwanda, Burundi and Somalia.

The end of the Cold War in the wake of the 1990s has created opportunity, not only for Africa, but for the rest of the world whereupon governments, organizations and individuals can work together to improve human conditions, enhance democracy and fundamental freedoms and promote security and stability. However, this golden opportunity is encircled by major risks. Without respect for human rights, formation of democratic institutions, and sustainable economic development, there is little Africa can do to capitalize on the opportunity ushered in by the end of the Cold War to develop Africa's own HF. It will, instead, squander that opportunity dealing with emergent armed conflicts, mostly internal and devastating.

Peace, stability and security in Africa are undermined by organized groups or individuals who are insensitive to human suffering and interested in personal gain. Jonas Savimbi of Angola once declared that his movement will continue to fight for as long as it will take to seize political power. The challenge for Africa today is how to do away with such warlords, arms dealers, political despots and conflict provocateurs who have turned African states such as Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi into laboratories of human carnage and ethnic genocide.

During the Cold War, security balances on the continent were linked to superpower interests and control. Armed conflict in Africa, therefore, took the form of proxy wars. The pattern reversed in the nineties. The Soviet Union collapsed and superpower struggles for Africa slowed down. The United States remained the only superpower keeping undue pressure on independent African states. The major cause of armed struggle and conflicts in Africa today is the HF decay emanating from the seed planted by colonialism and super power struggles for Africa. That seed keeps on breeding more and more conflict and violating human rights, political harmony and peaceful co-existence between states and ethnic groups within them. A legacy of military accumulation in African states continues to thrive in the Cold War aftermath. Arms dealers who emerged during the Cold War continue to forment conflict for gain (Ibingira, 1980:75). These dealers in armaments plunge African states into further political turmoil such as election disputes, succession rebellions and general civil strife. Other explanations of political conflicts in Africa have been offered.

Some attribute the emergent conflicts to uneven development and ethno-regional cleavages that colonial regimes nourished (Nzongolo-Ntalaja, 1987). Misguided aid policies, authoritarian economic policies and external interference are some of the major causal factors. Blame should also be placed on the accumulation of uncontrollable military hardware, whilst Abdulani emphasizes persistent interests of military - industrial complexes in states that manufacture export weapons. But more importantly, we must be critical of the style of African governance itself. None of the

mentioned explanations can be discounted. They are, in fact, all complementary. What is absent in them is focus on the quality and attitudes of the human beings who are at the helms of African states. The issue is whether or not those qualities and attitudes are peace-friendly or conflict provocative. These elements relate to the importance of HF development for the resolution of political conflict in Africa.

### **Political despotism as human factor decay**

Banda of Malawi is a classical example of despotic rule as HF decay. He named himself life president in 1971 and accumulated massive power around him and his Malawi Congress Party (MCP). The political clique which encircled him was brutal. So were his Young Malawi Pioneers who acted as his security machine.

To outsiders, Malawi seemed to enjoy internal political stability during Banda's rule. However, this stability was grafted and maintained at very high human cost (Kalinga, 1985) and at the expense of human rights, freedom and justice. In 1974, three ministers and a member of parliament were executed by agents of the regime. Disappearances were numerous.

Authoritarian political control became the decisive political condition for Malawi. It inevitably led to generalized human crisis. Around 1978, Malawians plunged into desperation and poverty. The possibility of political exit from their agony availed itself in 1992, beginning with a popular referendum that ushered in legal political opposition for the first time since independence. The May 1994 multi-party elections saw Banda's political collapse. Bakili Muluzi's United Democratic Front (UDF) won the elections and became Malawi's new government.

The new government began from a haunting heritage and background of poverty, oppression, disrespect of human rights, denial of freedom and justice and political greed. Muluzi faced the arduous task of trying to resolve the existing political and economic imbalances and steer Malawi towards equity, prosperity, human rights and democratic governance.

### **Human rights violations**

The Human Rights movement gained momentum in the anti-slavery campaigns of the last century. In 1948, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights provided a universalist stage for this evolution. Despite the 1986 Charter of Human and People's Rights which most African states ratified, the continent has no proud record of human rights to date. The paradox is that it is those same human rights which were denied to Africans by colonialists which African governments themselves violate after independence. In the 1979 Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia, about 750 000 persons were displaced. The 18 year civil war left Angola with the world's highest ratio of amputees per total population.

There is, however, information famine regarding the issue of human rights in Africa. Not enough conscience on the importance of the subject has been created so far. Consequently, masses of people have suffered ignorance and silence. Conflict, more than any other factor such as foreign debt, natural catastrophics and epidemics,



has torn apart African society leaving a trail of destruction, misery, refugees, diseases and poverty.

Of the eighty-five or so civil wars in the world since 1945, eighty-two took place in Africa. The longest on the continent is that of Sudan where the war left most schools inoperational for two decades. The war spread to surrounding states of Uganda and Ethiopia. Civil war in Zaire spread to neighbouring Angola, Burundi and Uganda. Genocidal conflict in Rwanda in 1994, cost the lives of an estimated 500 000 people and nearly two million who became refugees. Millions lost their homes and property.

A combination of internal and external peace destroyers cost Africa and its people years of development and progress. Post-independence conflict in Africa has led to the belief that Africa has been transformed from a continent of tranquil, hope and optimism to a simmering ball of ethnic fires and grief. The misfortune of conflict in Africa was not unforeseeable. The founding fathers of the Organization of African Unity took continental unity seriously from 1956, in view of the impending dangers of ethnic conflict, foreign intervention and neo-colonial domination. The arbitrary and artificial nature of African state boundaries did not augur well for peace, stability and development after independence. Although promotion of peace among African states is a major priority for the OAU, the eruption of civil war after civil war in one or other part of Africa has become virtually impossible to contain. African leaders themselves have not measured up to the demands of effective conflict resolution.

### **Causes of African civil wars**

No single factor on its own can explain the occurrence of civil strife and civil war in Africa. Some try to single out tribalism as the sole cause of ethnic strife and contradictions. But cases such as Angola defy tribalism as the cause of war in Africa. Research shows that the 1992 multiparty elections did not follow tribal or ethnic lines, so, the tribal factor has to be seen in relation to other factors.

#### *Ethnic cleavages*

The ethnic factor is only a condition which political manipulators capitalize on to provoke conflict or large scale civil strife as in the case of the Biafran war of 1967 to 1970 in Nigeria. Whilst ethnic diversity can play a constructive role, it has huge potential to bring catastrophe if and when ethnic identity becomes the determining factor in the allocation and distribution of opportunities, resources, privilege and power. The exploitation of ethnic difference inevitably leads to genocidal and ethnocidal brutalities. This was the case in Rwanda in 1994 when Tutsi politicians and families were massacred by Hutu soldiers and death squads.

It should be noted that the Hutu/Tutsi ethnic divide was inexplorative for centuries but turned for the worse under German colonial rule from 1890 to 1916. Belgian divide and rule policy promoted ethnic hatred and rivalry between Tutsis and Hutus. Tutsis got jobs and education during Belgian rule to the resentment of the Hutus. Rwandan political parties after independence continued to perceive the two ethnic groups as enemies.

### *Corrupt elites*

Certain African elites defy the 'rule of law' and seek political and social bases and support from their ethnic constituencies and strive to win and maintain their positions of power and privilege by inducing ethnic competition. Such elites do not hesitate to incite bloodbaths to hold on to power.

### *Loss of traditional ethos*

Colonization was so brutal that it dislocated all that was Africa's political heritage. Chiefs, kings and clan heads were removed from power and nation-building after independence. Traditional African institutions were seen as anti-socialist and obstacles to political and economic modernization. Yet, chiefs and kings in African tradition were stabilizing factors and represented social continuity.

The removal of the monarchy in Burundi marked the loss of its most important stabilizing factor and symbol of identity and security.

### *Coup d'etat*

In the absence of clear formulae for political succession, the army in Africa takes advantage to meddle in politics. Military take-overs have, therefore, bred the atmosphere of insecurity, violence, retribution and hunger for power. Coup attempts are accompanied by counter coups and virtual civil war and military reprisals, as is the case in Liberia since 1989.

### *External influence*

The civil war in Angola is attributable to both internal and external factors. The USA and USSR vied for ideological influence in Angola and fuelled the Angolan civil war. Each selected and supported local political formations which facilitated and promoted interests. The USA perceived UNITA as democratic and anti-communist, and gave it financial and military support. The USSR saw an ally in the MPLA and provided it with arms through Cuban troops.

At stake were the oil, diamonds, timber and agricultural resources in Angola. The US labelled the MPLA as communist but bought Angolan oil at the same time. Thus, foreign ideological strategic and economic interests, combined with local self-styled power seekers, largely sustained the warlords and civil war in Angola, from 1975 to 1994. The civil war ended following the end of the Cold War when the US could no longer justify its military support for UNITA and was, thus, forced to advocate non-military solutions.

Jonas Savimbi, the UNITA leader, rejected one political settlement after another, 'from the 1993 Abidjan Protocol to the 1994 election results. He also delayed the 1995 Lusaka Accord to end civil war. Savimbi exemplified a personality whose sole purpose for war was the grip on power. He fought for 30 years and no one knew what kind of agreement could be reached to satisfy his desire.

External intervention is responsible for conflict in Angola so as to open avenues for foreign companies to exploit Africa's resources. It is estimated that US\$500 million of diamonds are mined illegally by foreign companies in Angola.

## **OAU and conflict resolution**

Through regional initiatives, special envoys and eminent persons, the OAU is increasingly becoming sensitive to real conflict resolution. In 1995, the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments adopted the report on Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution and acknowledged the scourge of conflicts as one of the most serious impediments to Africa's development. As early as 1992, the OAU Heads of State and Government dedicated themselves to work together towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of African conflicts. The provision for such mechanism was expressed in Decision AHG/Dec. 1 (XXVIII).

The new Mechanism intended to empower the OAU vis-a-vis tension and conflict, is vulnerable for lack of equipment, institutions, logistics and collective political commitment. The OAU is also handicapped by its adherence to the culture of 'non-interference' in internal affairs of member states. African states also have weak internal and external defence and remain vulnerable to attacks on both fronts. For example, Guinea was defenceless against invasion by mercenaries in 1970. The OAU is thus rendered ineffective in its efforts to prevent or resolve serious African conflicts.

External powers, warlords and arms dealers will persist in ruining Africa if the OAU continues to put excessive importance on the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states.

## **Measures to reduce conflict**

### *Arms control*

We have known arms control essentially in relation to the East/West conflict and the need to control nuclear and weapons of mass destruction. But today, Africa needs special programs of arms control. These measures should focus on the suppliers, routes of supply, recipients and caretakers of war weapons.

The flow of arms into Africa needs to be controlled and reduced to minimum legitimate requirements. There should be ways of identifying arms dealers and warlords, the real merchants of death in Africa. The 1980 Review Conference on Conventional Weapons Convention has already set the trend towards strengthening protocols on the use of land-mines, booby-traps and other offensive devices in conflict situations.

### *Prosecution of war mongers and warlords*

The punishment of war criminals is relatively novel in Africa. The prosecution of war criminals carries the necessary psychological impact on prospective warlords to deter them from war activities by example of the consequences would that befall those found guilty.

### *Economic sanctions*

In situations where power is seized outside constitutional bounds, the imposition of economic sanctions has the unintended effect of punishing the civilians more than political wrong-doers. Again, there is the problem of effective enforcement as sanctions

— busting is a usual phenomenon. The apartheid regime in South Africa survived for two decades inspite of economic sanctions imposed by the international community. However, sanctions do have a deterrent and punitive effect on unconstitutional rulers.

#### *Pre-conflict inter-state surveillance*

A mechanism of identifying potential conflict spots on the continent should be set up and measures taken before they explode.

### **Conclusion**

To have peace, harmony, respect for human rights and democratic governance in Africa requires the development of Africa's HF. Institutions must be evolved to instil in our people commitment to freedom, justice, security and prosperity. There is also the need to instil in Africa's leadership, vision, personal integrity and the qualities of responsibility and accountability for their actions and decisions. Coexistence, peace, stability and democracy on the continent can only be achieved when these HF elements have been cultivated in our people and African society as a whole.

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