

**WAR AND THE DEBT BURDEN IN THE GREAT LAKES
REGION.**

By

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Introduction.

The task of this paper is to advance the view that the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) of Great Lakes Region would do better to endeavour and resolve political disharmony using peace making strategies rather than engaging in wars which are horribly expensive and largely counter-productive. Many African nations, as the case of the Great Lakes region illustrates, have a propensity to resort to war first and foremost and only remembering negotiated peace afterwards.

For the HIPCs of Great Lakes region to engage in armed conflict, is tantamount to self destruction. Given the glaring poverty, diseases, and the general underdevelopment, whatever war that is fought by African countries just adds another layer of indebtedness to an already insurmountable mountain of the debt burden. The clear implication is that even when one faction wins a battle, it is a mere Pyrrhic victory which may not justify the debt ridden countries' involvement in wars.

The paper contends that wars are a major cause of indebtedness. It also examines the current state of the debt burden of the countries of the Great Lakes region. In order to concretise this point other African countries of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and Sierra Leone also included in the discussions. The implications of the indebtedness for the well being of the people are also assessed. The fact that wars make the indebtedness situation worse is explained. In view of that discussion, it is argued that it is mistaken decision making for the HIPCs to resort to war as a means of resolving

political disharmony. Even the notion of the just war theory does not help to ease the debt burden.

In conclusion, the paper proposes that the HIPC's of the Great Lakes region should use peace making strategies instead of war to resolve the political disharmony within their boundaries and across borders.

War as a major cause of public indebtedness in Africa.

The World Bank has defined public debt as the "public guaranteed and private non guaranteed long term debt, the use of IMF credit, and the short term debt. Public loans are external obligations of public debtors, including the national government, its agencies, and autonomous public bodies" (*World Development Report*, 1997: 260).

One of the main reasons why countries contract loans is to finance wars both within and across common borders. The origin of the debt crisis is associated with the United States financial policies in the 1960's as a response to the Vietnam war. In that decade the US government spent more money than it had earned. So more dollar notes were printed to make up for the shortfall. This policy led to a situation whereby the dollar was no longer at par with the gold standard and obviously its exchange value plummeted, compelling Richard Nixon to intimate that the dollar would not be redeemable for gold. This affected oil prices because oil was priced in dollars.

The other phenomenon that led to the debt crisis was the pricing of petroleum. In the 1970s the value of petroleum dropped. The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) responded by hiking the oil prices in 1973 -1974 and 1979 -1981 periods. The OPEC countries made a lot of money from the exaggerated prices and deposited it in the Western

banks. The Western banks lent out the petrodollars to the Third World countries that needed money to invest in the construction of infrastructure and industries, and to pay for the expensive oil imports. The loans carried low interest rates but these were negative because they were below the rate of inflation. Consequently nations accumulated huge external debts.

The conditionalities which accompanied the loans required African countries to produce more primary export commodities like copper, tea, cocoa, coffee and cotton. As a lot of these crops were produced, there was a glut on such products on the world market which resulted in low prices the mid-1970s. Consequently the debt burden continued to weigh down African countries whose economies have been fragile.

The other issues associated with the emergence of the debt burden for the African countries were the recession in the developed countries in the 1970s and the mid-1980s which reduced the demand for exports from the African countries. The reduction in exports compelled African countries to borrow heavily in order to finance continuously the imports from the West. Such imports included military hardware and training (Njagih, 2000).

It is also clear that the heavy indebtedness is accentuated by the financial mismanagement of some African leaders. So the confusion in politics, ineffective macroeconomics policies and the cancerous corruption have contributed to making the debt situation assume crisis levels.

The cold war situation also contributed to the accumulation of the public debt for many African countries. Africa was of strategic importance to both Eastern and Western ideological blocks. So the powerful nations on either side motivated by ideological disparity gave loans to the poor African nations not so much to develop them because the loans in many cases were

given in form of military hardware to ensure that the political interests of the rich were catered for.

The above analysis clearly reveals that the debt burden in Africa is caused by combination of factors. Of these wars and defense are a major underlying one. Contracting loans for the purpose of acquiring military hardware renders the debt situation more lugubrious because wars do not produce tangible economic results. As a matter of fact they are a source of destruction and waste.

The Debt burden of the countries involved in wars.

The debt burden of African nations is over \$ 235b. This is higher than the total income of all the countries in the so-called sub-saharan Africa which is \$ 230b. The \$235b may not be fearfully a lot of money but given the fragility and meagreness of African economies, this debt represents a much bigger problem.

Most of the external debt is owed to Commercial banks, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Governments of the West, and the World Bank. The debt continues to grow because of the new loans. All this makes repayment rather impossible. Consequently, Africa meets only half of her debt servicing obligations. For instance in the mid 1990s Africa should have paid over \$ 18,000m but only paid about \$ 10,500m. The 21st century has dawned when the above situation has not changed at all for the better. As a matter of fact the debt burden has just become heavier. This is evidenced by the continuing requests from African countries for debt relief.

The Debt burden of the Warring African Nations.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Debt in \$,000</i>	<i>GNP per Capita</i>	<i>Debt Service % of GNP</i>	<i>Balance of payments</i>
Angola	12,173	140	131	--
Burundi	1,119	140	72	-103
Congo DR	12,929	110	196	-658
Congo	5,119	680	280	-252
Eriteria	149	200	12	-216
Ethiopia	10,352	100	135	-520
Rwanda	1,226	230	34	-143
Sirra leone	1,243	140	131	--
Sudan	16,843	290	172	-1.99
Uganda	3,935	310	35	-706
Zimbabwe	4,716	620	69	--

Source: *World Bank Development Indicators* (2000), PP. 10 - 247.

The above figures illustrate how serious the situation of indebtedness is especially among the warring countries. Apart from the Eriteria and Zimbabwe which have been classified as less indebted and moderately indebted respectively, the rest; Angola, Burundi, DR Congo, Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Uganda fall in the classification of severely indebted nations (*Development Indicators*, 2000: 252-255).

The fragility and vulnerability of the economies do not provide a logic justification for engaging in wars. Armed conflicts only serve to heighten the debt crisis and national misery. So the view that waging wars is not only expensive but also destructive goes without saying.

Expenditures on defense by countries in the Great Lakes region.

Fighting a war in the modern world is quite expensive. Therefore the countries that are engaged in wars in the Great Lakes region and beyond

spend colossal sums of money. The figures below show the size of the national armies (excluding paramilitaries and police forces) and the expenditures involved.

Defense Expenditures and trade in Arms

<i>Country</i>	<i>Armed Forces</i>	<i>% of state expenditure</i>	<i>% Arms exports of total imports</i>	<i>% Arms imports of total exports</i>
Angola	95,000	36.3	00	3.5
Burundi	35,000	25.8	00	16.5
Congo DR	50,000	41.4	00	2.4
Congo	10,000	12.3	00	1.1
Rwanda	40,000	22.2	00	6.7
Sierra Leone	5,000	33.0	00	00
Sudan	105,000	53.8	00	1.3
Uganda	50,000	23.9	00	2.3
Zimbabwe	40,000	11.9	00	0.5

Source: *World Bank Development Indicators*, (2000) pp. 284 -287.

The above figures confirm the assertion that the countries in the Great Lakes region have big military undertakings. It therefore follows that they have to spend a considerable amount of their revenue on the military machinery and war.

There is military training expenses. Military training is sold to African nations at a high cost. America alone runs five military training programmes in Africa. These are: the International Military Education and Training (IMET); the Expanded IMET (E-IMET); the Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET); the Africa Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI); and the Africa Centre for Security Studies (ACSS).

In the 1990s 34 African countries were involved in the US training programmes. Thirteen of these African countries have participated in the Congo war. IMET training charges for Africa in the 1990s has ranged between \$4m and \$8m. In 1998 when 400 African soldiers were trained under the IMET, US availed \$5.8m. (Njagih, 2000: 34). This year, the US is providing approximately \$8.1m in ACRI grants to 39 African countries including Uganda, South Africa, Eritrea and Ethiopia. The facts that Uganda is involved in Congo war, South Africa supplies arms to other African warlord and nations, Eritrea and Ethiopia are locked up in a deadly border war, do not matter as far as US military aid is concerned.

Njagih observes that this year, 2000, "the US administration has proposed military training for Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda and Kenya. Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Nigeria will share in an \$18m Africa Regional Stability initiative." The \$18m is far less when compared with the amounts of \$500m and \$1b that US gave in 1998 to Egypt and Israel respectively as military assistance, but given the weakness of the economies of the Great Lakes region, \$18m is a much bigger burden than the \$1b extended to Israel. This point is further evidenced by the fact that DR Congo owes America over \$150m in outstanding military loans, Liberia, Somalia and the Sudan together owe the US over \$160m.

The ACSS is supposed to "support democratic governance in Africa by offering senior African civil and military leaders a rigorous academic and practical programme in civil-military relations, national security strategy and defence economics." However, those who run the ACSS programme some times deviate from the above aim and inculcate in their trainees skills in repression. These skills when used cause untold suffering as

it happened in DR Congo in 1996 where civilians in refugee camps were massacred (Njagih, 2000: 34).

The figures also indicate that none of the warring countries manufactures arms or ammunitions for export. Rather, most of their military hardware is imported. It may be true that a single bullet costs \$3 and an AK-47 assault rifle goes for \$6 on the black market which makes them relatively cheap. However, when the total number of weapons is considered, there is surely some huge expenses involved. Take for instance during the time of Mobutu, DR Congo received military hardware worth \$300m from the US. Uganda has received about \$1.5m in weapon assistance from US, and Rwanda in 1993 was importing arms from the same source.

Besides the US, Russia has also supplied arms to Africa. For instance Ethiopia in 1999 ordered 8 Sukhoi 27 jet fighters, and Eriteria acquired 10 MiG-29 interceptors. The two nations have had to hire foreign pilots to fly the new planes. Eriteria bought BM21 multi-barrelled rocket launchers from Bulgaria and obtained engines for T-55 tanks from Romania. Ethiopia obtained ammunition from China and over 100 T-55 tanks from Bulgaria. France supplied communication equipment.

The countries of Uganda and Ethiopia have been estimated to be spending each month, \$ 1m on the wars in Congo and Ethiopia respectively. Zimbabwe's involvement in the Congo is estimated to be costing \$3m a month to maintain 10,000 troops. This has contributed to the economic crisis that country(Osike, 2000). Although the estimates are not the official ones, they are reasonable enough to be believed given the big numbers of the armed forces and the fact that most if not all the military supplies including food have to be imported from abroad. For instance the Uganda People's

Defence Forces imported from South Africa food, which became controversial, worth \$1.5m (Wakabi, 2000).

The 1999 figures indicate that Uganda's total defense expenditure has been Ug. Shs 193.86b per year. This expenditure was estimated to rise to Ug. Shs 208.62b in the following financial year. The expenses were to raise if Uganda continued her military campaigns in the Congo. The war expenses have averaged at 2.2% of the GDP over the last five years. Uganda like all the other warring nations, is the 17th poorest nation in the world. In view of that one can assert that it is neither productive nor helpful for Uganda to engage in wars.

The IMF identified 41 heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) in the world. Out of the 41 HIPC, 33 are on the African continent.

Overall Assessment of Debt Sustainability for the 41 HIPC

<i>Sustainable</i>	<i>Possibly Stressed</i>	<i>Unsustainable</i>	<i>Not yet determined.</i>
<i>Angola</i>	<i>Bolivia</i>	<i>Burundi</i>	<i>Liberia</i>
<i>Benin</i>	<i>Cameroon</i>	<i>Guinea Bissau</i>	<i>Nigeria</i>
<i>Burkina Faso</i>	<i>Congo</i>	<i>Mozambique</i>	<i>Somalia</i>
<i>Central Africa</i>	<i>Cote d'Ivoire</i>	<i>Nicaragua</i>	
<i>Chad</i>	<i>Ethiopia</i>	<i>Sao Tome & Principe</i>	
<i>Equatorial Guinea</i>	<i>Guyana</i>	<i>Sudan</i>	
<i>Ghana</i>	<i>Madagascar</i>	<i>Congo DR</i>	
<i>Honduras</i>	<i>Myanmar</i>	<i>Zambia</i>	
<i>Kenya</i>	<i>Rwanda</i>		
<i>Loas PDR</i>	<i>Tanzania</i>		
<i>Mali</i>	<i>Uganda</i>		
<i>Mauritania</i>			
<i>Senegal</i>			
<i>Sierra Leone</i>			
<i>Togo</i>			
<i>Vietnam</i>			
<i>Yemen</i>			

Source: IMF Survey, 15 July 1996. p. 230.

Out of the 8 countries whose debt is ranked unsustainable 7 are African and 3 of these have been involved in fighting in the Great Lakes region. Another 12 countries that are considered stressed by the debt burden, 9 of them are in Africa, and 4 of them have been engaged in the wars in the Great Lakes region. The remaining 18 countries whose debt burden is considered sustainable, 14 of them are African, and three of these have been fighting wars for the past several years. It can be clearly seen that Africa and the Great Lakes region in particular are actually choked by the debt burden. In view of such a situation one wonders whether it ethical for such countries to engage in wars when they fully know that they do not have enough money to cater for the basic needs of the citizens and use the surplus finance wars.

The Effects of wars and indebtedness on people's well-being.

Fighting wars incessantly whether within or across borders just compounds the debt situation of the country. This is so because when much of the earnings of a country are expended on debt servicing and financing military expeditions, crucial areas like social services and human development are left unfunded adequately.

It is worthy noting that if per capita computation is done, every person in Africa owes the creditor nations and their commercial banks approximately \$480 which is much higher than their per capita incomes (Janet Museveni, 1998). African countries spend 4 times more money on debt repayments than and they do on health care (*Sounding the Trumpet*, 1998:18). As a result diseases like yaws, fever, malaria, tuberculosis, cholera typhoid and yellow fever, most of which are on the brink of total eradication in many parts of the world are making a come back in Africa. The situation

is compounded further by the emergence of new viruses especially the HIV and the *Ebola*. If the resources spent on waging wars was used to improve the health of the citizens, the people of the Great Lakes region would be better off than they are when living under a constant state of war and insecurity.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) report states that Uganda's Health Care is the 44th poorest in the World. DR Congo and Sierra Leone are among the last. The policy of cost sharing in health service advocated in Uganda also leads to poverty. The WHO director, Brandtland has argued that in trying to buy health from their own pockets, people pay and become poorer (Wendo, 2000).

In the DR Congo the civil conflict has led to untold poverty yet this is the country which should have been one of the richest in the world. The country is divided among the warring parties; the government forces, rebel groups and several armies of outside nations backing one side or the other (Robinson, 2000: 26). Given the biting poverty, local communities fight against one another. For example, the Hema and the Lendu have always fought over land and cattle. The foreign armies make the situation even worse especially they take sides and train local in their thousands to fight one another.

It is important also to note that because huge chunks of the national resources are expended on fighting wars, the warring countries are not able to deal with other national problems. Such problems include droughts, famine, epidemics, floods, dilapidated highways and the like. In Uganda cases of children with brain tumours and heart complications have always had to make appeals for several months in order to raise money from well wishers for the air tickets so that they could travel to South Africa or India

where such complicated operations could be done. The state cannot provide an air ticket because the wars take all the financial resources.

It is such effects that moved President Eisenhower to state that "every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies ... a theft from those who hunger and not fed, from those who are cold and not clothed" (Eisenhower, 1953). This concept of theft is relevant to the situation in the Great lakes region in that the people who are to pay back the loans do not get the basic services which they should receive.

Even fighting a just war does not ease the debt burden.

Some leaders in the Great Lakes region have intimated that they will not fight any war except for a just cause. The idea of just cause lends itself to the just war tradition.

This tradition has a long history. It was elaborated by the early church fathers like Ambrose, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. In the 1960s, Paul Ramsey did some considerable work on the just war thinking. In the 1980s Arthur Holmes provided more reflections on the tradition. Ugandans have always taught that "*tomegga ate noluma*", that is, if you have defeated your opponent it would be unethical to inflict further pain. So, to talk about just war is in a way to look for the morality of war.

There are several principles associated with a just cause for war or *jus ad bellum* . According to the just war tradition the principles that govern the ethical warfare are:

a) *Just cause*. For a war to be fought there should be some just cause. In other words, the cause for going to war must be righteous, that is, defensive and not aggressive. The objectives of the war should be to secure justice, or to protect the innocent people, or to repel an aggressor.

Interestingly each party involved in the Congo war claims to be fighting for a just cause. The problem is that the just causes diverge so much.

b) *Legitimately authorised.* This means a just war is one declared by the legitimate authority of the land. This rules out the private armies or call them rebels. However, in the Great Lakes region much of the fighting involves rebels within and across borders.

c) *War must be the last resort.* War must be only undertaken when all attempts at negotiation and reconciliation have been exhausted. The authorities and the warring rebels in the Great Lakes region have a propensity of going to war without first trying peace making strategies to resolve the political disharmony among them.

d) *The means of fighting must be proportionate.* A just war is one whose means are controlled in such a way that wanton violence is not meted out to innocent people. Or unnecessary destruction caused on a country's infrastructure and resources. The intention is that combatants should not use more violence than necessary. The General Assembly of the UN in 1970 affirmed the immunity of non-combatants (Stott, 1984: 85). In the Great Lakes region warring parties do not seem to be aware of this principle for civilians and property have been annihilated with impunity.

e) *Reasonable success.* There must be reasonable glimmering of success if war is waged. This requires the parties to a conflict to use the consequentialist gauge when deciding on whether to go for war or not. In other words the guiding question should be will the country be better off if a war is fought or if peace making strategies are sought no matter what and how long it takes? The Bible also teaches counting the costs before embarking on a war (Luke 14: 31-32).

The wars that have been fought in the Great Lakes region have not adhered to the just war tradition. This is why it is common to hear of atrocities being committed by national armies and rebels alike. As a result, civilians have been killed in their hundreds, and towns and villages razed to the ground. In this way war costs is not limited to only expenses on firearms and maintenance of troops but also on the reconstruction of destroyed infrastructures. The UN has contemplated demanding Rwanda and Uganda pay war reparations to Congo for the lives lost and property destroyed in the Kasangani battles. The Lord Liberation Army in northern Uganda and Allied Democratic Forces in western Uganda have kidnapped school children, burnt college students, dismembered others and burnt villages, camps and town. All this has been done in addition to wanton killings. In the process more costs are incurred and the debt burden becomes heavier.

Peacemaking to resolve political disharmony.

Political disharmony can easily lead to war. The political disharmony in the DR Congo between the various parties precipitated war drawing in forces from Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe to assist Kabila. On the other hand, the Congolese rebel groups attracted supporting troops from Uganda and Rwanda.

The exact motives for the war are myriad however the following can be noted: ethnic rivalry, protection of national borders, and access to Congo's huge mineral wealth. The consequence of this war has led to thousands of people dead and property worth millions of dollars destroyed. After all this mayhem, the warring nations began to explore peace making as a solution to the problem. The big question is why not seek political harmony in a peaceful manner in first instance?

The fact that there is a dire need for peace in the Great Lakes region calls for no special orchestra. A common adage in international diplomacy is "in order to make peace, prepare for war" (Assefa 1996). This wisdom can be challenged by the view that "in order to avoid war make peace". Peace making is the deliberate effort to transform conflictual and destructive interactions into more co-operative and constructive relationships.

Assefa (1996) has pointed out four cardinal principles which are pertinent to peace making. These are:

- i. *Identification of the causes of the conflict.* Peace cannot be made unless the root causes of the conflict are identified and dealt with. This must be done before overt conflict flares up.
- ii. *Justice and fairness of the process.* Attaining peace requires paying attention to the justice and fairness of the process and the results of the settlement.
- iii. *Discovery of common interests and objectives.* The parties to a conflict can discover a commonality of interests and objectives that can lead to mutually acceptable solutions to their problems.
- iv. *Restructuring of relationships.* Peace making involves a restructuring of the relationship that exists between the parties.

The case of African National Congress and the Apartheid regime in South Africa clearly illustrate the fact that peace making can achieve better results in resolving political disharmony than war (Mandela, 1994). Even when the monetary implications are not reckoned, horrors of war are enough to show that negotiated peace is far superior to fighting. Mandela was firm on negotiation as the path to a solution in South Africa (Mandela, 1994: 621).

The South African cases also shows that peace making involves each side setting conditions. The State's condition was "renounce violence and we talk, otherwise we do not talk with terrorists". ANC also insisted that "if talking took place there would no violence". In the Great Lakes the governments in power have had maxims of "we do not talk to rebels". This attitude is not coterminous with peace making. Peacemakers are usually prepared to shift grounds if the conditions they set are likely to forestall negotiations.

ANC realised that after fighting for three quarters of a century, it no longer made sense to continue losing millions of lives. One can realise that the leadership should have a right sense of timing. So peace making was the best option. There was a temptation to think that abandoning war would signify weakness and betrayal (P. 626). However, Mandela and others were able to overcome the temptation and talks were held.

Another strategy in the South African peace making was leaders taking the initiative. Mandela sought an opportunity to hold talks with the Apartheid leadership. In addition to that he involved the other leaders who were in prison and in exile. He sought every conceivable opportunity including one of talking to the Eminent Person Group appointed by the Commonwealth in 1985.

Peacemaking demands conviction on the part of the leadership. Mandela states that "I affirmed in the strongest terms possible that violence could never be the ultimate solution to the situation in South Africa and that men and women by their nature require some kind of negotiated understanding." (p.630). Some leaders in the Great Lakes region have been heard saying that they will just finish their opponents militarily. The reality,

however, the so called a handful of rebels have proved impossible to annihilate in last several years of fighting.

The willingness to listen is another essential peacemaking strategy. Peacemaking was possible because the leadership in power was willing to listen. Mandela testifies in reference to his meeting with the then South African Minister of Justice, Kobie Coetsee. "I spent three hours in conversation with him and was struck by his sophistication and willingness to listen" (p. 632). The South African case further shows that peacemaking calls for patience and moving in incremental stages.

On July 10, 1999, six African states including the President Laurent Kabila signed a peace plan pledging to end the war that had began in August 1998. A joint military commission was to monitor the implementation of the peace plan. The peace plan unfortunately did not take effect because of the wrangling within the leadership of the rebel groups (Dludlu & Bell, 2000). As if that was not enough blow to the peace plan, Rwanda and Uganda fought in Kisangani battles which left over 400 civilians and 120 troops dead. The way forward in resolving the political disharmony in Congo is peacemaking. This must be explored further and further even amidst setbacks.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the debt burden of the countries involved in the Congo war and that of Sierra Leone, Eritria and Ethiopia the other African countries that are also engaged in civil and across the border fighting. It been demonstrated that wars make the debt situation worse. Besides that, the citizens' lives and well being are jeopardised.

Fighting wars in a just fashion cannot lessen the debt burden and its effects on the societies. It is also noted that the warring parties do not have the spirit and conviction of waging a war in accordance with the just war tradition.

In view of the debt crisis in which the countries of the Great Lakes region are entrenched, and their attendant problems, this paper has proposed peacemaking as the best approach to resolving political disharmony. Peacemaking is cheaper and cannot complicate the debt situation of the HIPC's of the Great Lakes region as the armed conflict does.

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