

Ten troubles with Africa: The role of Cultural Diplomacy
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The African continent has a population of over 920 million and covers no less than one-fifth of the world's total land area. These figures make it the second largest and second most populous continent. The area also has an abundance of human and natural resources, with comparatively high levels of oil, gold and diamonds all providing valuable trading commodities. Such statistics suggest an area of considerable potential and a solid foundation for development. In the span of the five decades since 1960 when the majority of Africa moved from being a continent of colonies to one of independent states, Africa's potential, however, remains unfulfilled. During this time the continent has instead become the poster child of corruption, poverty, disease, violent conflict and failed states. How could countries so rich in human and natural resources have spiralled so much out of control?

Colonial Legacy

Africa today is confronted by a range of diverse and grave problems that must be addressed as a priority in order for the continent to move forward. There are a variety of different reasons for the state of disrepair in many African countries; the behavior of the colonial powers is often cited as one. There is no country or people in Africa whose histories were not affected by the continent's affiliation with Europe—a legacy whose effects are still felt today. The artificial boundaries created in the “Scramble for Africa” left in its stead a legacy of clashes as different ethnic groups were divided and re-grouped together, with little consideration for the consequences, into countries towards which they felt little, if any, affinity. The boundaries cut through over 150 ethnic “cultural areas”, dividing pre-existing economic and social units and distorting the development of entire regions. This led to the marginalization of some ethnic groups, tribalism, and in the notable case of Rwanda, genocide. As John Reader elaborates in “Africa: A Biography of the Continent” “were it not for the importunities of Europe, Africa might have enlarged upon its indigenous talents and found an independent route to the present—one that was inspired by resolutions from within rather than examples from without”. In addition, the existing social and economic development plans were founded upon the assumption that colonialism would be capable of being sustained. With the collapse of colonial rule, many states were consequently left with governments poorly equipped to handle complex economies and compete in the world market.

History cannot be eradicated, and the mistakes of colonialism cannot be undone. What matters now is how the continent deals with its problems today. While it is important to identify problems with the continent, it is even more important to identify solutions.

Conflict

Instances of conflict abound over the years throughout Africa. As kinship, ethnic and economic links remained stronger than the obligations of national identity, a newly-independent Africa went through phases of ethnic clashes, coups and military rule. The dreams of Africa flourishing into a continent of peaceful democratic states quickly disintegrated as more than seventy coups occurred in the first thirty years of independence. By the 1990s, very few states conserved even the barest traces of democracy.

Take the example of the ongoing war in Darfur in the western region of Sudan. Sudan, the largest country in Africa, has a long history of civil war stemming from racial and cultural inequality between the Arab Muslim majority in the country's northern region, and the non-Arab Christian majority in the southern region. Since 2003, Sudan has been besieged by severe conflict, as the Western Sudanese militia known as the Janjaweed have committed what according to the United States Government is systematic “genocide”—the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st century—against black Africans in Darfur. According to various estimates, as many as 400,000 have been killed and over 2.5 million have been displaced during the last five years. This has earned Sudan the dubious honour of being the world's second most unstable country in the Foreign Policy's Failed State Index. Sudan's President, Omar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir, is presently being accused by the International Criminal Court of crimes against humanity.

Zimbabwe follows very closely behind Sudan, holding the third spot in the Failed State Index as it regresses daily in the hands of President Robert Mugabe's present regime. Zimbabwe is not only witnessing the worst economic deterioration in history, with hyperinflation rates reaching over 10,000% in recent months. (As of 25 July 2008, it takes 29 billion Zimbabwe Dollars to equal the value

of a euro.) It is also in the throes of both political and social conflict as Mugabe clings to power despite a heavily disputed and discredited election and continues to carry out, according to Human Rights Watch, government-sponsored violence against opposition groups.

Peace negotiations and agreements, like the case of Côte d'Ivoire's response to 2002 violence regarding the north-south divide, would go a long way in countering conflict both along ethnic, religious and political lines all over the continent. A new era of majority rule would also ensure that Africa's diverse ethnicities are represented in their nation's governments.

Monetary Corruption

According to Robert Calderisi, author of "The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid isn't working", "the simplest way to explain Africa's problems is that it has never known good government". Paul Wolfowitz, the former President of the World Bank, cited poor governance and corruption as a cancer on the process of global development. Corruption effectively prevents development, making it a very real and pervasive problem. Africa has earned a reputation for corrupt regimes inundated by informal payments and bribes. Transparency International has in the past identified 50 of the 52 African states as having either "serious" or "rampant" levels of corruption. Such corruption has far-reaching effects and is without doubt one of the reasons why 26 of the bottom 27 countries in the United Nations 2007/2008 Human Development report are all African.

The corruption of African leaders have developed alongside existing incidents of social discontent along ethnic lines and perceived inequality in distribution of wealth. The ensuing power struggles and overall lack of cooperation between ethnicities can be theorized as having created a fertile breeding ground for corruption, leaving national issues inadequately addressed and injustices largely unresolved: a theory proved in the case of Nigeria.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation with over 250 ethnic groups. Furthermore, it is the world's eighth largest oil exporter. Given the high price of oil, Nigeria should theoretically be rich; however, Nigeria is ranked 158 out of 177 on the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Poverty Index, with 70% of the population are below poverty line according to CIA World Factbook estimates from 2007. This gross discrepancy is one of the reasons why Nigeria has been described by the Economist as a country with "such a glaring mismatch between their actual state and their extraordinary potential", having gone from being the promising "Giant of Africa" to Africa's ailing giant. However, in the last years the government has begun showing political will through its role in creating a highly praised crimes commission unit supporting the government's promise of making anti-corruption initiatives a priority.

A reason for such high levels of corruption on the continent, especially in the government sector, is the dearth of accountability. According to the Stolen Assets Recovery (StAR) Initiative, a joint venture of the World Bank and the UN, corrupt money associated with bribes received by public officials from developing and transition countries is estimated to be between \$20 billion and \$40 billion per year—a figure equivalent to 20 to 40% of flows of official development assistance (ODA). These are funds that could provide much needed aid to the poverty stricken populace.

Good governance, accountability and transparency are the keys to tackling corruption in any society. The fight against corruption requires a joint effort from all parts of society—the citizens and a responsible media must maintain pressure on their governments and in turn democratic governments will be held accountable for their actions. As an essential measure prerequisite for accountability, all heads of state, ministers and officials must have transparent bank accounts, which are open to public scrutiny. In addition, both developed and developing countries must work together. While developing countries need to improve governance and accountability, developed nations must also stop providing a safe haven for stolen proceeds.

Poverty

Corruption has often been cited as the root cause of poverty, an opinion largely shared by Wolfowitz. There is no place where extreme poverty is more evident than sub-Saharan Africa. Half of the more than 600 million people south of the Sahara live in poverty. We have all heard this before: almost 50% of sub-Saharan Africans live on less than a dollar a day—the highest rate of poverty in the world.

The consequences of this are innumerable. Many women are forced to go into prostitution, and given the nature of the trade leads to an increase in the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV. Crime is a further disheartening result of the overwhelming and crippling effects of poverty as citizens are forced to choose between run-ins with the law and their very survival. Children are forced to join the work force and provide for their families who otherwise cannot provide for them. This opens a Pandora's box as it disrupts education and prohibits children from pursuing higher degrees and becoming professionals. As a result, Africa is suffering from a brain drain; 80% of Zimbabweans live today below the poverty line and Zimbabwe's hyperinflation has forced many intellectuals and professionals to seek better opportunities in South Africa.

Poor Infrastructure

Corruption and bad governance can be cited as the root of many of the continent's problems. The poor infrastructure particularly for transport and electricity illustrates this clearly. According to Robert Calderisi, not enough is being done to meet the tremendous need for infrastructural development. Despite the many millions of dollars that have been given in aid and supposedly invested in social amenities, there is still an unacceptable lack of potable water, schools, roads, power lines, railways, telecommunication, ports and hospitals all over the continent. The lack of major road networks between major African cities inevitably leads to difficulties in maintaining efficient economic and political relations between neighbors, in addition to making the cost of trade disproportionately high.

Regarding electricity, the Nigerian former government-owned sole energy provider, Nigerian Electric Power Authority (NEPA), is so poor in its services that it has been dubbed, half jokingly but wholly critically "Never Expect Power Always". It was recently privatized, and is now known as The Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), or to most Nigerians, "Problem Has Changed Name". Under the new ownership, the situation has gotten phenomenally worse, with some areas going weeks without any power. The privatisation is in foresight highly criticized, despite having been extensively advised by the World Bank. Did Nigeria get it backwards? Is Joseph E. Stiglitz right, when he argues in his book "Globalization and its Discontents", privatizing a monopoly before an effective competition or regulatory authority [is] in place might simply replace a government monopoly with a private monopoly, even more ruthless in exploiting the consumer?

When infrastructure is weak, whole economies will remain underdeveloped and poverty entrenched. Better infrastructure has the power to spread economic opportunities and progress, and has the potential to reduce conflict as better roads provide the means of improved communication, increasingly incorporating groups from traditionally marginal locations. As a result, the lack of functional roads is a problem that cannot be dismissed lightly. More of Africa's budgets need to be allocated to ensuring that basic human needs are satisfied. To achieve real results, budget accountability is indispensable.

Disease

Diseases cause the child mortality rate in the continent to be one of the highest in the world. According to the Department for International Development, child mortality rates run at an average rate of 172 deaths per 1000 babies (compared with 9 per 1000 in developed nations) and at least 24 million pregnancies are threatened by malaria each year. Diseases like malaria, diphtheria and sleeping sickness (human African trypanosomiasis) are spread by the consumption of dirty or contaminated water, poverty and due to Africa's position as the cradle of humanity and the natural preponderance of many strains of diseases. They are also highly aggravated by the fake or adulterated drugs in circulation, the failure to distribute adequate medical supplies, immunization and poor healthcare systems, all of which desperately require better facilities, drug regulation policies and doctors.

According to the Red Cross reports, the HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa is so severe that it should be classified as a disaster comparable to famine or floods. HIV/AIDS is the continent's biggest killer: There are currently an estimated 22.5 million people living with AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, with infection rates in some countries as high as 39%, as in the case of Swaziland.

The virus continues to spread rapidly, aided in many cases not only by poverty, lack of proper education and awareness, but also by a basic denial of its existence. South African President Thabo Mbeki has in the past repeatedly questioned scientific consensus on whether HIV causes AIDS, and the country's health minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang has continually promoted the use of garlic and beetroot rather than antiretroviral drug treatment as a means of treating Africa's AIDS epidemic. Even

when the virus is acknowledged, which had until recently seldom been done, the purchase and use of condoms and other forms of contraception is widely socially unacceptable and stigmatized, especially for women. In many cases, the preventive prescriptions were challenged by the belief that condoms inhibit the enjoyment of sex; by the contradiction of monogamous sexual practices with local societal norms; or by ancient beliefs deeply entrenched in rural areas that scorn contraception in favour of ancestral protection. Moreover, the Catholic Church prohibits the use of condoms, and according to the BBC an estimated 143 million Catholics live in Africa. This stigma extends to discrimination towards people living with HIV/AIDS.

It has been reported that contaminated blood transfusions account for about 10% of new HIV infections in Nigeria. There is a high demand for blood because of blood loss from surgery, childbirth, road-traffic accidents, anaemia and malaria. This is further complicated in crowded urban areas and rural areas with hospitals that do not have the technology to effectively screen blood and therefore contaminated blood is often used.

The above spells a very complicated picture in the fight against the virus. There is thus an even greater need for a more aggressive collective fight against the virus both in its prevention and treatment. Botswana, often cited as a leader in the effort to combat the epidemic, boasts both a national government as well as non-governmental organisations that have been very active with systematic HIV prevention programs. Additionally, school curricula should include preventive measures such as sex education—this is not especially easy in societies where sex is traditionally a very private subject—but the former is an absolute necessity. UNAIDS estimated that only 18% of women and 21% of men in Nigeria between the ages of 15 and 24 were able to identify effective ways of preventing HIV.

Foreign Aid

Dependency on foreign aid is a controversial issue in the continent. The critical voices argue that African countries have remained in what has become a vicious circle of high-interest loans, flawed policy advice, unhelpful preconditions, and pleas for debt relief. Calderisi, a long time World Bank official, argues that foreign aid has not worked, with much money lost or stolen, further complicated by what he refers to as “basic clash of value” between Africans and westerners, who engage in “lopsided dialogue” with each other. According to him, aid ensures that “few African governments are more in control of anything now than they were in 1960”. He further argues that, “abundant aid offers false hope, dampens the initiative to develop the continent’s own resources, including its people, and calms western consciences while dulling them to the even greater horrors that lie ahead”.

Others counter this critique by claiming that aid in the form of loans, and capacity-building initiatives, gives Africans a much-needed push, allowing them to help themselves. This argument can also highlight the many lives saved by foreign aid in the form of emergency medical supplies, food and clean water.

It has been often quoted, “give a man fish and he can feed himself for just a day. Teach a man how to fish and he can feed himself for a lifetime”. It is important that while a certain amount of foreign aid is necessary, Africa must not remain eternally dependent on other countries but rather must learn to stand on its own feet, a feat that could be accomplished by education of its population and a stronger focus on development. Experience shows that aid works best where governments are already on the right track as they establish priorities and implement feasible policies. An in-depth study conducted by Craig Burnside and David Dollar in 2000 found that foreign aid would only have the desired consequence when given to countries with strong democratic institutions. Given that such institutions are often lacking in African states, it is not surprising that foreign aid has been linked to corruption and often simply judged to be ineffective.

This conviction is close to that of economist P.T. Bauer who was quoted by Calderisi in 1981 as having written, the argument that aid is indispensable for development runs into an inescapable dilemma. If the condition of development other than capital are present, the capital required will either be generated locally or be available commercially from abroad to governments or to businesses. If the required conditions are not present, then aid will be ineffective and wasted.

Curse of Commodities

The problems arising from an abundance of valuable natural resources in some areas is another catalyst, albeit an ironic one, that exacerbates the continent's troubles. From the diamond and gold rush in 1870s, which laid the foundation for a legally stipulated apartheid through the introduction of racially discriminatory labour laws; to the horrors of the Congo Free State in the time of King Leopold II's rubber plantations in the early 1900s, petroleum, diamonds, gold and rubber are resources that have become aggravators of Africa's problems instead of bringing in the promised wealth. Many have died in the battles for these resources, and entire governments, like Nigeria during the Biafran war, have collapsed. This problem has been particularly salient in the Nigeria's Niger Delta, which has seen a significant rise in the number of kidnappings and vandalism against oil companies like Shell, soiling the country's foreign image in the process.

Furthermore, a blinkered focus on these natural resources has led to an ignorance of other areas of sustainable investment such as agriculture and renewable energy, and has increased the continent's dependency on imports as its industries are left under-developed. This is especially problematic given that natural resources are scarce. The solution should involve increased investment in agriculture, and provide subsidies especially to large-scale farmers.

Brain Drain

"The emigration of African professionals to the West is one of the greatest obstacles to Africa's Development" ~ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

The concept of "brain drain"—the emigration of creative and intelligent individuals with technical skills or knowledge due to lack of opportunity or political instability in the country of origin—has often been identified as a major problem in Africa, and one that has not been sufficiently addressed. There are a number of reasons why professionals and talented students leave Africa to pursue their careers and studies abroad, predominantly in Europe and North America. While economic factors, such as higher salaries, are no doubt an important pull factor for professionals, the lack of research facilities, funding, and high-quality further education options in African universities are all further reasons why students decide to look elsewhere.

To begin with, there is a problem with the educational system because of the chronic lack of schools and qualified teachers. The result is that Africa as a continent has a literacy rate below 60% amongst children, a statistic that worsens each year. According to UNESCO, primary school enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa has declined since 1980, falling from 58% to 50% while that of the rest of the developing world rises.

70,000 African professionals are leaving each year in order to secure better education to states as close as South Africa, where many Zimbabweans have fled as a result of hyperinflation and lack of jobs—and to those as far off as China, Africa's newest and most active investor. These talented people leave behind nations struggling with failing economies, corrupt governments, high inflation, food shortages, high mortality rates and inadequate social amenities.

There are other reasons behind this trend. According to Reader, one of the greatest mistakes of the education was teaching the African to become European—and increasingly American—instead of remaining African. This is problematic because European standards quickly became African ones, as they learned European history, politics, language, religion and were taught that most of their old standards of excellence were sub par. The history books during the colonial period repeatedly proselytized the belief "nos ancêtres les Gaulois" ("our ancestors the Gauls"). Reader proposes that in future, African education should aim at making an African remain an African and taking interest in her own country. In addition, Africans should re-embrace the ideological ideas of "négritude", in this case, interpreted as the celebration of "African-ness", a literary and political movement driven by former Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor and Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, who believed that a solidarity founded upon the shared black heritage of members of the African Diaspora could be an effective form of empowerment and resistance

Bad policy and the continued flight of educated citizens will exacerbate the spread of disease, famine, unemployment and desperation, which will prove deadly for Africa. Until these skilled Africans can be attracted to return, that is to say, until they can be assured of a stable future, real change will be hard to

come by. With this in mind, policies that can persuade Africans to remain at home will resonate far beyond the borders of individual nations.

Education

Education in Africa is plagued by incomplete curricula and in many cases it is simply non-existent. Half or more of the adult population of at least 13 countries in Africa are illiterate; a statistic that increases dramatically when only women are taken into account.

The reasons for the high illiteracy rate should sound familiar by now. The lack of adequate facilities, lack of qualified teachers; the prevailing cultures against female education, the lack of funds and general poverty, and the inaccessibility of schools are all to blame. African schools have the task of moulding future leaders and much needed professionals and as such their role in relieving many of these problems cannot be overemphasised. However, while it is important to focus on ensuring that all Africans have access to minimal education, it is also important that the existing curricula be optimised. By modifying the content of the curricula, shifting the focus toward not only science but also African history, which is presently not being taught in the majority of African countries, the pride of being African is strengthened, as well as the facilitation of dialogue and cooperation. Furthermore, the teaching of social and civic responsibilities, critical thinking, imagination, tolerance, the need for sub-regional and continental unity, and professionalism should be highly encouraged as Africans learn the value of commitment to their nations and to themselves.

The Need for Cultural Diplomacy in Africa

Although Africa is the second largest continent in the world in terms of both population and landmass, it is also the most divided with 53 distinct countries speaking an estimated 2,000 different languages, separated according to ethnic identities, religion and colour. From recent riots in Kenya stemming from disputed election results, to Zimbabwe brewing with unrest as Mugabe is sworn in for a sixth term amid uproar from the international community and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) opposition party led by Morgan Tsvangirai—there is widespread tension. Reconciling situations such as those in Sudan, Chad, Kenya and Zimbabwe is a significant challenge towards which Cultural Diplomacy should be aimed.

Cultural Diplomacy has been described by Joseph S. Nye as “a prime example of ‘soft power,’ or the ability to persuade through culture, value, and ideas, as opposed to ‘hard power,’ which conquers or coerces through military might”. It is the sustained dialogue between individuals and groups from different backgrounds through culture. Culture represents not only a system of beliefs and values that each side should seek to understand and to which they should be sensitive, but in many cases also provides a medium, such as sport, art and music through which this interaction can take place. The underlying philosophy is that relationships between different cultures can be greatly improved through increased dialogue, understanding and trust.

There are no easy solutions to the problems that Africa faces. Cultural Diplomacy as constructive inter-cultural dialogue, however, is important to Africa because the problems the continent faces cannot be addressed by individual states alone. While significant regional variations can be found in infection levels of HIV/AIDS, the level of poverty, the extent of corruption, the scale of these problems and the geographical practicalities dictate that the problems cannot effectively be tackled at the national level. Even violent conflict taking place between two ethnic groups within a state will have international consequences as neighbouring states are flooded with refugees, retreating combatants and small arms. What is needed are initiatives and programs that bring African states closer together, encouraging them to share their expertise and resources, and help present a united front against their troubles.

Cultural Diplomacy can also help to reduce the instances of violent conflict between ethnic groups. Despite numerous examples of intercultural violent conflict, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that this violent conflict is the result of cultural differences by themselves. Instead, violent conflict is more likely the result of a lack of dialogue, miscommunication and misunderstanding between groups. When this is present, cultural differences can sometimes be manipulated by group leadership for political and/or economical reasons. By increasing the level and quality of contact between cultures, a level of a constant dialogue, understanding and cooperation can be achieved that will make future violent conflict less likely. To improve communication and to prevent misunderstanding and conflict it is important to ensure that such interaction is constructive, peaceful and based on effective dialogue, understanding and trust.

Examples of Cultural Diplomacy in Africa

In addressing the problems of the continent, the traditional, top-down approach to international and intercultural relations can be optimized by emphasizing constructive dialogue between governments and representatives. This approach can also be supported and complemented by initiatives that raise intercultural awareness and understanding at all levels. As a result, they build support grassroots movements. Cultural Diplomacy is therefore an increasingly important tool in today's environment.

Cultural Diplomacy at the Political Level

How can countries work better together? The emergence of regional organizations as important players in the struggle for African stability and development illustrates two points. Firstly, constructive dialogue and understanding between states at the political level is important. Secondly, the problems facing Africa are best addressed through united, multilateral action from regional groups: the role of regional groups is especially important considering the spill over effect of being devastated by both a poor economy and violent conflict.

The African Union (AU), an intergovernmental organization consisting of all 53 African nations, is an example of an organization working to improve regional cooperation, and through doing so facilitating cultural communication between different states. The constituent act of the African Union (AU) declares that the organization is inspired "to promote unity, solidarity, cohesion and cooperation among the peoples of Africa and African states". In addition to working to prevent and combat the behavior of corrupt governments, it works to ensure peace and assist in the fight against HIV/AIDS. With similar goals to the EU, the AU has drawn criticism from many sides.

Peacekeeping forces have been accused of being disorganized and inadequate, and cynics have argued that the organization has produced little more than rhetoric on other issues concerning peace and security. In judging the AU, however, direct comparisons with the EU are unfair. The AU represents a firm step in the right direction for Africa, encouraging multilateral discussion and negotiation on important issues. Furthermore, the actual deployment of AU peacekeeping forces in Darfur and Somalia should be seen as a success in itself.

However, the AU is not without blame. According to the Economist's July issue, many AU members are hardly paragons of democracy themselves: for example Gabon's President Omar Bongo, who has been in power for decades, was reported as saying that Mr. Mugabe should be recognized as Zimbabwe's new president, this is despite the controversy behind his re-election. The activity of the UN Security Council is an illustration of the difficulties involved in reaching a consensus on united action, let alone securing troop contributions for peacekeeping forces. Yet, the very fact that the AU met recently in Egypt to contemplate suspending Mugabe until new elections have been held is a step in the right direction, and represents a milestone in the history of regional organizations in Africa.

On a more focused regional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), an organization in West Africa with 15 member states and a combined population of 230 million, can also claim success in some areas. Since its inception in 1975, the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), a multilateral armed force, has intervened for the purpose of regional peace and stability on four occasions. The criticism from the international community of such activity, though serious, has been in general constructive and acknowledges the importance of the force's development rather than advocating its disbandment. As a Human Rights Watch Report remarked following ECOMOG's intervention in Liberia in 1993, "The ECOMOG intervention succeeded in temporarily stopping the bloodshed and ethnic killing." Progress made in other areas by ECOWAS includes enabling citizens to move freely between seven of the member states through a common travel certificate scheme, and plans to introduce a single currency for West Africa are at an advanced stage.

In order to better understand the importance and role of these regional groups in solving Africa's troubles, take the further example of the intergovernmental Southern African Development Community (SADC), an influential regional coalition of 14 countries that has been recently been under heavy criticism and accused of failure to live up to its own expectations. The organisation, because of its search for consensus, has to date done little to address the state of emergency in Zimbabwe, one of its member countries, as Zimbabwe's citizens are forced to live in abject poverty in the foreground of escalating violence and dependence on foreign aid, the latter of which is increasingly hampered by Mugabe's security forces. However, SADC has the power and possibility to greatly influence affairs in

Zimbabwe positively both by the application of regional pressure and, in the case of South Africa's Presidents Mbeki's approach, by means of dialogue. That SADC has not taken full advantage of its position in resolving the political impasse, in ending the violence, and in appealing to Mugabe for a run-off election, however, is another problem.

Cultural Diplomacy at the Grassroots Level

A focused look at the Ghanaian education system illustrates the role that Cultural Diplomacy can play in ensuring stability between different cultural groups at the grassroots level. Ghana has a population of approx. 23 million and there are seven ethnic groups in the country, with each comprise more than 2.5% of the population, in addition to the hundreds of smaller tribes, which speak more than 250 languages and dialects. Despite these cultural divisions, and despite having won independence at around the same time as other African states, Ghana has become something of an exception in Western Africa. Its ranking in the UN Human Development Index (135th in the 177 states assessed), may not seem high, but is 17 places above its nearest neighbor Togo (152nd), and significantly higher than other neighbors Cote d'Ivoire (166th), and Burkina Faso (176th). More impressively, Ghana has remained comparatively stable since its independence in 1957, and ranks 40th out of the 140 states assessed in the Global Peace Index Rankings 2008, a position above the UK (49) and in stark contrast to Burkina Faso (81st), Côte d'Ivoire (122nd) and Somalia (139th) (Togo was not included). Ghana should be considered something of an example for other African states.

Ghana's education system has frequently been cited as an important rationale for the stability of the country. The system has in particular been praised for being extensive enough to provide education for the masses, and for the existence of a large number of boarding schools across the country, a nurtured legacy of the first president of the modern Ghanaian state, Kwame Nkrumah. Since the students do not need to make the daily journey to school, these boarding schools are able to bring together children from the different parts of the country, and therefore from the different ethnic groups. Bringing together children at such an impressionable age and allowing them to live and study together has proved to be a great social leveller in Ghana: the children learn they have nothing to fear from the other cultural groups, and are able to develop strong interethnic friendships. There is little doubt that this system had helped to develop a society that demonstrates tolerance and cooperation between the different ethnic groups.

Cultural Diplomacy in the Artistic Field: FESPACO

The biennial Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO) brings together industry professionals and fans from across the continent for a week-long celebration that raises the profile of African cinema and encourages intercultural cooperation. Established in 1969, FESPACO has grown from a small festival with only 5 African countries represented and 23 films entered, to an internationally recognized event drawing sponsorship from Europe, the occasional Hollywood star and 5,000 official participants. Such is the success of FESPACO that it is widely considered to be the biggest cultural event on the African continent. This growth and attention has not come without controversy, but the overall picture is one of remarkable success.

The weeklong program provides a neutral cultural meeting point that facilitates inter-cultural dialogue, interaction, and cooperation between fans, stars and professionals of all cultural backgrounds. In addition to the intercultural dialogue that the festival engenders, FESPACO helps to raise awareness of important challenges facing the continent today, in particular by offering awards for films in this area. The most prestigious award, the Étalon de Yennenga (The Stallion of Yennenga), awarded to the African film that "best portrays Africa's realities" (according to FESPACO regulations), was most recently captured by Nigerian director Newton Aduaka's *Ezra*, at the 20th FESPACO in 2007. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary, the Minister of Affairs released two DVD collections containing Étalon-winning films, with the films subtitled in five languages: French, English, Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese. Another award is presented to the best Director from the African Diaspora, a group increasingly recognized as playing a decisive role in determining Africa's future. By organising not-for-profit screenings in rural areas, the management of the organisation hopes to spread African cinema further, a goal that cannot help but support increased tolerance and cooperation between ethnic groups. It is of great significance that Article I of the festival's regulations state "FESPACO is open to all African films."

By focusing on art as a means to bring different cultural groups together, FESPACO shows the potential for such programs to emerge on a more widespread scale in a range of different artistic fields.

The Potential for Cultural Diplomacy in Africa

Improving interaction between Africa and the West

While certain criticisms of the West's attempt to alleviate Africa's problems are fair, Western actors can and should still play an important role in the development of Africa. Such efforts, however, must be based on dialogue and cooperation with legitimate African partners.

The intervention, or lack thereof, by the UN's peacekeeping forces in Rwanda and Somalia in the early 1990s proved to be expensive failures that cost Africa dearly, and damaged the UN's reputation significantly. Other controversial policy decisions such as the provision of aid has also been criticised for a number of now familiar reasons. The image of negative Western intervention is not helped by the debate surrounding the role of expatriates: of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) directed to Africa, roughly 35% goes on supporting some 150,000 expatriates working in the continent. Meanwhile, Africa, as earlier discussed, loses around 70,000 of its most talented individuals, predominantly to Europe and North America, through the process of brain drain.

Even though Western assistance has in cases does more harm than good, it should not be dismissed as a tool for development in Africa. There are many positive examples of constructive interaction in this field. The Ocean Data and Information Network for African (ODINAFRICA), for example, is a program that was developed by the UNESCO inter-governmental Oceanographic Commission to bring together marine institutions from 25 different African coastal states. The network has been working together to improve the capacity for African marine institutions to receive, share, analyse and interpret oceanic data. Although this appears to be a strong example of Cultural Diplomacy in Africa, of different African groups working together for their own collective benefit, it also illustrates the importance of Western knowledge. The first goal of the organisation was to enable "the participating member states to get access to data available in other data centres worldwide". Furthermore, the program is supported financially by a \$2.5 billion grant from the government of Flanders, Belgium, and around half of the 20-capacity building-and-skills workshops held until now have been hosted in Ostend, Belgium. The lesson that can be learned here is that external assistance can make an important difference when it is aimed toward a genuine need, and is provided with the support and cooperation of local actors and organisations in Africa.

Academic Cooperation and Exchange

In addition to the role and benefits and potential of Cultural Diplomacy at a higher level, there is also the opportunity for civil society institutions to influence positively problems at the grass roots level. Education, awareness programs, cultural exchange programs and above all regional co-operations are some examples of means by which the civil society can aim to achieve this feat by building bridges between otherwise very different people.

Cultural Diplomacy initiatives within the field of academia has the potential to be a significant influence on the positive development of Africa, working to fight the problem of the brain drain identified by UNECA above, and helping to improve stability in general. Exchange programs between African universities, similar to the European Union's Erasmus program, provide a good launching point. Africa, its history, people and politics are little understood, and more often than not misunderstood, even within Africa, and an exchange would be beneficial for all involved. It would allow both students and professors to learn more about the potential for intercultural communication, in addition to acquiring a better sense of foreign government policies, the benefits of democracy and the powers they hold to instigate positive change.

By introducing extensive and diverse partnerships between universities and high schools in different countries, African states will be better able to share the research and expertise they have acquired in particular subject areas. Such a sharing of resources will not only improve the standards of universities in general, but the partnerships will enable students to have a greater range of options available to them to study within Africa.

A further benefit of an extensive, interconnected network of higher education institutions is that the intercultural dialogue and cooperation it engenders between individuals works to reduce the likelihood of interethnic conflict in the future. The experience of living abroad and studying at a foreign African university will give students the chance to develop lasting friendships with individuals from all cultural

backgrounds, and to function as unofficial cultural ambassadors themselves as they represent their respective cultures abroad.

In the course of their travels, Africans living and studying abroad, in other African countries, will learn tolerance of differences in ethnicity and culture, with the ultimate goal of eliminating ethnic tensions. Furthermore, they could return to their home countries with valuable skills.

Founded in 1967, the Association of African Universities is helping to address this issue and can now boast a membership of 199 higher education institutions in 45 African countries. There is, however, room for development here. For example, universities could benefit from organising their calendars, whereby each department in a university may have its own strategic partnerships and students are able to integrate semesters spent abroad into their degree, and funding is available from a number of external sources.

Conclusion

It has been said, “African societies are like a football team in which, as a result of personal rivalries and lack of team spirit, one player will not pass the ball to another out of fear that the latter might score a goal”. In view of this, how can we hope for victory?

While Africa is not without its fair share of problems, it is unthinkable to give up on a continent that has so much unfulfilled potential, notwithstanding the disastrous effects a failing continent would have on the world. While the baggage of colonial legacy is still visible, and the corruption of many African leaders seemingly inescapable, there are many problems that cannot be blamed on the behaviour of individuals, groups or nations, but are a result of the collective failures of many: the failures of a continent. Unity within Africa is a very important step in ensuring that the countries work together at all levels of society towards solving the continent’s problems. For Africa to utilize its wealth in human and natural resources, to take its place as a key political and economic player, the different African states must pull together, politically, economically and culturally to share their knowledge and experience, and fight their problems as a unified body. As Julius Nyerere, first President of an independent Tanzania, described his dream of a new and unified Africa: “our goal must be a United States of Africa”. Only when the strong can learn to support the weak, and Africa can learn to speak as one voice, can the continent learn to become less dependent on external assistance to abate the troubles of Africa and begin to fulfil its dreams of almost five decades.

by Chidiogo Akunyili, with contributions from Peter Rees and Andrew Zhou

ICD's forthcoming programme, Cultural Diplomacy in Africa aims to address some of the issues raised in this article. The programme consists of a week-long symposium that brings together Young Leaders from Africa and the wider international community for an exchange of culture and ideas, as well as to discuss the potential of cultural diplomacy for Africa. For more information, please contact Chidiogo Akunyili (akunyili@culturaldiplomacy.org).