

Contextual Analysis and Implications on Political Efficacy in the Great Lakes and Eastern Africa

Dr. Elias Opongo, SJ¹

Introduction

An analysis of the conflicts, politics, economic stability and youth participation in governance structures within the Great Lakes and Eastern Africa regions has to take into account the diverse historical trajectories, key protagonists and subsequent implications for peace and stability in the respective country and regions. I will conduct a contextual analysis followed by implications for reclaiming the civic space.

The Great Lakes Region

The Great Lakes Region (GLR) has known many conflicts since independence in the 1960s. All the three countries, Rwanda, Burundi and DRC, have experienced political and ethnic conflicts. Rwanda and Burundi have had inter-ethnic conflicts between the Hutu and Tutsi through instrumentalization of ethnic identities by the political elite. In Rwanda the conflicts culminated into genocide against the Tutsis and moderate Hutus in 1994 leading to the deaths of more than 800,000 people. Burundi has also had intermittent conflicts: 1972; 1993 with the killing of Melchior Ndadaye the first democratically elected and the first Hutu president of the country. He was assassinated after three months in office leading to a decade long civil war. The DRC has had intermittent protracted conflicts which have left the country in a permanent awkward state between war and peace. The above situations has diminished the democratic space in the great lakes region.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The late 1990s and the early 2000s saw the Democratic Republic of Congo (henceforward DRC), a country endowed with an abundance of mineral wealth, turn into a battlefield. A decade has gone by since what can be considered as, the deadliest conflict since World War II ended, yet no lasting peace can be seen in the country. Eastern DRC in general and the Kivu in particular, remain in a state of neither war nor peace (Huening, 2013, p. 13). A range of militarized local conflicts have plagued the DRC since 2006, a period that the international community has incorrectly termed as ‘post-conflict’ given the continuation of the conflict. Rooted both in the history of colonialism and the continuing aftermath of the 1994 genocide in neighboring Rwanda, the combination of crises in the DRC occurs at the local, regional and national levels. The M23 rebel group, which is among dozens of rebel and militia groups in the country, emerged as a proxy militia group for both Uganda and Rwanda. The rebel group has been one of the destabilizing elements in the eastern part of the country. However, the government signed a peace deal with the rebel group in 2013 but there have been fears that the M23 could re-emerge in a different outfit.² President Joseph Kabila attempts to delay the elections and possibly extend his term in office has led to street protests. A recent phenomenon (since October 2014) in the eastern parts of the country is the emergence of a jihadist Islamic group. This groups has been involved in heinous acts of killings and human

¹ Dr. Elias Opongo SJ, is the director of Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations (HIPSIR), Hekima University College, Catholic University of Eastern Africa. He is also a Jesuit priest from Kenya.

² Reuters (13 Jan 2014) “Credible reports of Congo's defeated M23 rebels regrouping: U.N.” Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-congo-democratic-un-idUSBREA0C1DC20140113>

rights violations. The terrorist group has declared a caliphate in the claimed territories between Beni, Eringeti and the border of Uganda.³ The local bishops and church leaders have condemned the violence carried out by this group.

The crisis in the DRC has spread instability to other countries in the region, notably Rwanda and Uganda. As such, the country has attracted many peace efforts from various regional bodies and the wider international community. Regional efforts have also been made by the region's heads of state. On 24 February 2013, the "Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for DRC and the Region" was signed by Heads of State of Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, the DRC, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, highlighting, amongst others, the need for more cooperation between states in a bid to restore peace in the DRC. A number of non-state actors such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international agencies, faith-based organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs) have been at the epicentre of conflict management and peacebuilding in the country. The Diocese of Bukavu is launching peace studies program at the Catholic University. The justice and peace commission has also been active in promoting peace.

Rwanda

The story of Rwanda cannot be told without mentioning the one hundred days in 1994, during which a genocidal anarchy reigned, claiming the lives of more than 800,000 people, mostly Tutsis and moderate Hutus (Des Forges, 1999, p. 17). Twenty two years after the genocide, under the leadership of the charismatic leader, Paul Kagame, Rwanda is now experiencing economic development and national stability. However, there has been a direct correlation between Kagame's rise to power and the decline in political freedom in Rwanda. Rwanda's path to democratic governance showed promise in 2003 after multiparty elections but has since been marred by a complete shutdown of political space. Posed as a champion of democracy, Kagame has used the moral high ground of genocide as a political weapon to remove all real and perceived threats to his regime. The ruling Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) has maintained zero-sum access to power in two ways: the creation of predatory laws to inflict an atmosphere of intimidation; and the elimination of all effective political opposition. In 2015 a move to extend Kagame's tenure as president was approved by the parliament and later by Rwandan public through a referendum. The constitution was amended to allow the incumbent president to run for a third term in 2017.

There have been a number of initiatives for peace by different organizations. The Church in Rwanda was dented in the post genocide period with accusations that some of its members either participated or facilitated genocide. It has been an uphill task to regain the credibility of the church. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Rwanda works in close collaboration with the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace towards poverty reduction and reconciliation. Evangelical Prison Ministry Rwanda works on restorative justice in prisons. It is affiliated with the International Network of Prison Ministries. Episcopal Church of Rwanda, like Christian Action for Reconciliation and Social Assistance (CARSA), has also been involved in reconciliation work in Rwanda, among other initiatives.

³ World Watch Monitor, "Islamist Militia Threaten DR-Congo." Available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2015/10/4051016/>

Burundi

The analysis of Burundi conflict is grounded on a history of intermittent conflicts and competition for political power. Like Rwanda, politicians have instrumentalized ethnic identities to instigate violence and control the military and politics. Hence, since independence in 1962, Burundi has been in conflict scenarios: in 1965, 1972, 1988, 1991, 1993, and the 1994-2005 civil wars leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands, and many more rendered IDPs or fleeing to neighboring countries as refugees (Tesfay, 2014, p. 3). While violence in Burundi had relatively diminished by the end of 2012, this seemed to have been the lull before the storm as recent events indicate. There have been tensions and scenes of violence between Burundi's ruling party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), and the opposition. These led to a failed coup attempt ahead of the country's 2015 elections. The re-election of the president has led to persistence confrontation between the government and the opposition. There have been increased human rights violations as thousands of people of have been tortured, arbitrarily detained, sexually abused, or disappeared. More than 250,000 people have fled into the neighbouring country.⁴

There have been a number of peace initiatives by diverse actors. Local, regional and international organizations, multilateral institutions, various governments and regional heads of state, civil society organizations and faith-based organizations are involved at different levels. Unfortunately, a number of civil society organizations have been deregistered by the government. The churches have been conducted quiet diplomacy with the government but the latter has remained hostile to such initiatives.

Eastern Africa Region

The Eastern African region has faced diverse forms of conflicts and instability. Kenya and Uganda have been reasonably stable while the South Sudan has been the most unstable with persistent conflicts for many years. The conflicts in Somalia and DRC have led to large influx of refugees into Kenya and Uganda. Kenya currently has the largest refugee camp in the world in Dadaab with a population of more than 400,000 refugees. The Kenyan government has attributed the terrorist attacks in the country to Al Shabaab terrorist group from Somalia which is said to recruit from the Dadaab refugee camp. Kenya and Uganda both receive refugees from South Sudan and have also contributed to peacekeeping forces to stabilize the latter.

Uganda

Since her independence in 1962, Uganda has been marked by frequent conflicts and insecurity such as the Kabaka crisis of 1966, the Iddi Amin coup of 1971, the 1979 war that saw the removal of the Amin's government by the Tanzanian forces; the 1980-1986 National Resistance Army's five year guerrilla war that took place in Luweero triangle and the conflict in northern Uganda waged by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) for 22 years. While Uganda currently enjoys relative stability, it is still in many respects a divided country, both politically and economically. The legacy of multiple and cyclical conflicts and grave human rights violations, and a correspondingly weak sense of national identity continue to render the country fragile.

⁴ UNHCR, "Burundi Refugees Tell of New Horrors." Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2016/5/5735d6f44/burundi-refugees-tell-of-new-horrors.html>

There have been numerous attempts to reach a peace agreement between the LRA and the government but Joseph Kony the leader of the rebel group has withdrawn from the peace talks in a number of instances. The Catholic Archdiocese of Gulu in collaboration with the Catholic Relief Service (CRS), and under the leadership of Archbishop John Baptist Odama, succeeded in bringing the government and the LRA into the negotiation table. The Catholic Episcopal conference has been spearheading national reconciliation initiatives in the country. The government has made some positive progress in its program of Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP) and has laid out projects to reconstruct the northern region which has been marginalized over the years.

South Sudan

South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, seceded from Khartoum in July 2011 following the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the longest civil war in Africa. However, the conflict with Khartoum, ethno-political competition within the government, and lack of economic development prevent South Sudan from experiencing peace. The Nuer-Dinka ethnic conflicts have characterized the country since independence even though there have been other ethnic conflicts. Both ethnic groups were initially united in their struggle against the northern Khartoum government before independence. However, after independence both groups have been in conflict. The Dinka, through President Salva Kiir's authoritarianism, have held the most important ministries and managed oil proceeds in a manner that favors their ethnic groups, marginalizing the Nuer and other minority ethnic groups in the country. To further worsen the situation, Kiir expelled representatives of other communities from relevant public docket, forcing ministers and military officers from non-Dinka ethnic groups to resign, including his deputy president Riek Machar and the latter's spokesperson James Gatdet. However, this conflict was temporarily resolved through a peace deal signed in August 2015. The peace deal has however collapsed following the renewed upsurge of violence. In July 2016 Machar was replaced as deputy president by Taban Deng Gai and the former has since gone into exile.

As a result of the crisis, about 1.3 million South Sudanese have been internally displaced and 350,000 people have fled to the neighbouring countries (Cordaid, 2015), mostly women and children. Tens of thousands of people have died while four million are facing starvation. The government and the rebels have been accused of widespread atrocities and war crimes, including gang rapes, massacres, and attacks against aid organizations and peacekeepers.

The greatest peace-building organ is the Church which also provides about 70% of the social services. Key leaders like bishops, priests and missionaries provide services in education and health service, and advocacy for gender equality. The Diocese of Torit's Development and Relief Department (DARD), works closely with Action Africa Help International (AAH-I) and UNHCR, in offering technical assistance to returnees and support to farming community.⁵ The Catholic Church in collaboration with the World Council of Churches has been speaking out against the actors of the protracted conflict and gross human rights violations.

Kenya

⁵ The Episcopal Church of Sudan

Kenya has the strongest economy in the region and has played a key role in peace efforts in its neighbouring countries. However, the country faces a number of challenges related to governance and security. Corruption is at a chronic level and many government sectors have been involved in the vice. Politics in Kenya is ethnicized and ethnic identities are politicized leaving the electoral population at the mercy of ethnic kingpins who often influence the voting patterns and subsequent distribution of government positions, national resources and economic development in a winner takes all system. This has meant that elections have sometimes been marred with violence and intimidation leading to a general apathy against politics. In the pastoral communities in northern Kenya there have been cattle raids and bloody conflicts that have cost lives. These conflicts rotate around the question of community identities (especially those in the pastoral communities) in relation to borders. Some conflicts concerning ethnic borders include Samburu-Isiolo; Narok-Kisii; Kericho-Kisumu; Kajiado-Limuru; Tana River and Mount Elgon.

Over the years, there have been several attempts to address some of the conflicts in Kenya and increase political participation. The establishment of the National Steering Committee on Peace building and Conflict Management, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), and Independent Electoral Boundary Commission (IEBC) have contributed to peacebuilding and increased democratic space. The civil society organizations (CSOs), religious leaders and faith based organizations (FBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector, regional organizations and development partners among others, have engaged in collaborative efforts for peace.

The Catholic Church recently (November 2016) issued a statement condemning high levels of corruption, ethnicized politics and lack of accountability in governance structures. The bishops called on Kenyans to shun away from corruption and participate in the elections as citizen responsibility. According to the Kenyan Human Rights Commission, faith-based organizations (FBOs) played a positive role especially after the violence: Imams at the Coast Province used the mosque to preach peace and coexistence while the traditional leaders such as the Kaya elders equally promoted peace (Mulongo, 2010). To a great extent the peaceful nature of the 2013 elections could be attributed to the diverse efforts for peace by different actors above.

Claiming civic space in the political sphere

Civic space refers to the multi-level structures, institutions, socio-cultural and religious values as well as individual and group aspirations that facilitate citizen participation in governance, politics, social action, social transformation and propagation of basic social-economic rights. In order for citizens to enjoy and freely use the civic space governments ought to provide a positive political atmosphere that allows for freedom of expression and association, political participation, freedom of the media and openness to conflict resolution mechanisms. In order to facilitate citizen participation in civic space, there has to be a sense of political efficacy. In other words, citizens, as groups and individuals, need to feel that their action have the capacity to have an impact for a positive change.

The concept of political efficacy can be traced to the 1954 work of Campbell, Gurin and Miller, *The Voter Decides*. It was developed in relation to the study of national elections of the United States of America. They defined political efficacy as:

...as the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, i.e. that it is worthwhile [sic] to perform one's civic duties. It is the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change (Campbell et al., 1954: 187).

In other words, political efficacy invokes the feeling that it is generally worthwhile engaging in politics and social actions that can bring the desired change. However, this will only be possible if there is a certain level of responsiveness of the political system to the citizens' demands. Political efficacy according to Sohl (2014) encompasses both an individual's assessment of external factors, such as the government, the political system, and political actors, and internal factors, such as the individual's ability to understand politics and have the motivation to get involved in political activities. Generally, political efficacy is the feeling that political change is possible and that an individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change (Schultz, 2005). As a result, political efficacy helps an individual determine their political competence and decide whether to engage in politics (Sohl, 2014).

The theory of political efficacy is important in analysing the diverse perspectives of civil space and citizen participation, particularly in relation to the youth participation. The countries under study Uganda, Kenya and South Sudan under Eastern Africa Region and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Burundi under the Great Lakes Region have varying levels of youth participation in politics. There is a general apathy among the youth to participate in democratic process. The factors behind such an apathy vary from country to country. However, to a great extent the youth choose or are driven to alternative channels of participation, either through violence, political mobilization or recruitment into armed groups.

The **Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC)** population is mostly made up of the youth with 65% of the population under the age 25 years (USAID, 2015). However, this young generation has found themselves sandwiched in different kinds of conflicts that the country has been facing. Therefore, instead of developing political efficacy for political participation in the national politics a good number of the youth have opted to join the armed groups especially in eastern DRC. The country has experienced intermittent conflicts since independence which has eroded institutions of governance. As a result, the mechanisms for youth political participation are minimal. However, existence of opposition political parties has provided a platform for the youth alternative engagement in governance. This is either through public campaigns for particular political candidates or through demonstrations against unpopular government policies. For example, many youth have come out on the streets to protest against President Joseph Kabila's attempts to manipulate the constitution in order to extend his term. However, the youth participation in the political processes has been hampered by government's heavy handedness in dealing with its critics.

Even though young people are the majority of **Rwanda's** population, historically they have lacked meaningful opportunities to engage in politics. During the 1994 genocide, the political elite mobilised the disenfranchised youth to instigate the violence. Even after the genocide, their involvement in governance is barely visible. Besides, the majority of Rwandan youth have no employment and are largely rural with minimum levels of education. Participation in politics has sometimes been through subtle coercive mechanisms applied by the government.

The youth in **Burundi** have been actively involved in politics. They have campaigned for their preferred political candidate while at the same time expressed their opinion in public

rallies, street demonstrations, radio and television. The youth have been active in the civil society, claiming for people's rights where they have been violated and conscientizing the population about their duties and rights. However, following the move by the incumbent president, Pierre Nkurunziza, to run for a third term in office in 2015, there were demonstrations in different parts of the country. The government allegedly armed a youth group known as the *imbonerakure* (translated from Kirundi as 'those that see far'), to harass and kill opponents of the government.⁶ There has been increased government crackdowns on the dissidents.

In **Kenya**, the level of youth participation in politics is high an indication of high political efficacy. During the electioneering period, the youth played varying roles. Some have fronted themselves as leaders for elections, others have resorted to digital campaigning through social media while others have been manipulated into violence. In the 2013 general elections Kenyans elected a much higher number of young politicians compared to other years. The youngest elected member of parliament was 25 years. He ran as an independent candidate and beat more experienced politicians. Young people are also often used to instigate violence against opponents. For example, following the 2007/2008 election the youth were mobilized to carry out violence along ethnic lines following the dispute over the election results. Nonetheless, the socialization of the Kenyan youth in political participation has been based on ethnic identities revolving around tribal kingpins. This has reduced the youth political participation to ethnic competition.

The youth's level of political participation in **Uganda** has remained relatively low despite the existence of mechanism to champion their interests. Most of the youth organizations in the country are not well organized and are mostly urban based, subsequently, excluding the rural youths. Therefore, despite their demographic dominance the youth participation in politics and governance is less-influential. This indicates a low level of political efficacy. This has hampered the participation of the rural youth in the political arena. Nonetheless, just like in the case of the Kenyan youth, the Ugandan youth have been used to instigate violence against their opponents. The political participation of the young people in the country has however been hampered by the heavy handedness of the government against dissident voices.

The decline of external efficacy explains the increasing involvement of the **South Sudanese** youths in armed groups. Given the militarization of conflicts and political space, there are limited avenues for political participation and expression of opinions. Subsequently, the immediate option left for the youth is joining armed groups, whether government or militia. The socialization of military, politics and ethnic identities has destroyed the minimum democratic structures in place and weakened youth participation in politics. With infrastructures such as schools destroyed South Sudan continues to produce a generation of youth without education nor any future to look forward to.

⁶ Human Rights Watch, 2016. "Burundi: Abductions, Killings, Spread Fear. UN Security Council should press for deployment of international police presence." Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/25/burundi-abductions-killings-spread-fear> (Accessed on 17/03/2016).

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