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Major Flaws in Conflict Prevention Policies towards Africa. The Conceptual Deficits of International Actors' Approaches and How to Overcome Them

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Major Flaws in Conflict Prevention Policies towards Africa. The Conceptual Deficits of International Actors' Approaches and How to Overcome Them

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(with assistance from Hans-Christian Mahnke)

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Major Flaws in Conflict Prevention Policies towards Africa.

The Conceptual Deficits of International Actors' Approaches and How to Overcome Them*

Abstract

Current thinking on African conflicts suffers from misinterpretations (oversimplification, lack of focus, lack of conceptual clarity, state-centrism and lack of vision). The paper analyses a variety of the dominant explanations of major international actors and donors, showing how these frequently do not distinguish with sufficient clarity between the 'root causes' of a conflict, its aggravating factors and its triggers. Specifically, a correct assessment of conflict prolonging (or sustaining) factors is of vital importance in Africa's lingering confrontations. Broader approaches (e.g. "structural stability") offer a better analytical framework than familiar one-dimensional explanations. Moreover, for explaining and dealing with violent conflicts a shift of attention from the nation-state towards the local and sub-regional level is needed.

Key Words: Sub-Saharan Africa, Conflict Prevention, Conflict Factors, Root causes, Conflict Prolonging Factors, Escalation Patterns, Peace Order, Structural Stability

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Zusammenfassung

Zentrale Mängel der Konfliktpräventionspolitik gegenüber Afrika. Die konzeptionellen Schwächen von Ansätzen internationaler Akteure und wie sie überwunden werden können

Aktuelle Analysen afrikanischer Gewaltkonflikte sind häufig voller Fehlinterpretationen (Mangel an Differenzierung, Genauigkeit und konzeptioneller Klarheit, Staatszentriertheit, fehlende mittelfristige Zielvorstellungen). Breitere Ansätze (z. B. das Modell der Strukturellen Stabilität) könnten die Grundlage für bessere Analyseraster und Politiken sein als eindimensionale Erklärungen. häufig differenzieren Erklärungsansätze nicht mit ausreichender Klarheit zwischen Ursachen, verschärfenden und auslösenden Faktoren. Insbesondere die richtige Einordnung konfliktverlängernder Faktoren ist in den jahrzehntelangen gewaltsamen Auseinandersetzungen in Afrika von zentraler Bedeutung. Das Diskussionspapier stellt die große Variationsbreite dominanter Erklärungsmuster der wichtigsten internationalen Geber und Akteure gegenüber und fordert einen Perspektivenwechsel zum Einbezug der lokalen und der subregionalen Ebene für die Erklärung und Bearbeitung gewaltsamer Konflikte.

Article Outline

1. Introduction
2. The Case for Adequate Differentiation of Conflict Causes
3. Conflict Prolonging Factors
 - 3.1. Oil and Warfare
 - 3.2. Illegal Trafficking of Precious Resources
 - 3.3. Small Arms and War as a Profession
 - 3.4. Declining States
 - 3.5. Diaspora and Other Factors
4. The Diverging and Simplistic Understanding of Conflict Causes by International Actors
 - 4.1. The United Nations
 - 4.2. The European Union
 - 4.3. The World Bank
 - 4.4. OECD DAC
 - 4.5. The G8 (and Its Africa Action Plan)
 - 4.6. United Kingdom
 - 4.7. United States of America
 - 4.8. France
 - 4.9. Germany
5. Conclusions and Perspectives

Bibliography

1. Introduction

In Africa south of the Sahara, we are confronted with enduring violent conflicts in which a clear understanding of the reasons of continuation is as important as knowing about the origins. Current thinking on African conflicts is still influenced by a tendency to focus predominantly on 'root causes' of violent conflict whose resolution is frequently beyond reach.

Africa's wars are in fact among the longest enduring in the world: some of the most striking examples are the armed conflict in the North East of Ethiopia from 1962-1991, or civil war and rebellion in Southern Sudan from 1955-72 (and from 1983 till January 2005); the war that began as a liberation war in Angola only ended in 2003, but began as far back as 1961 – this means that whole generations did not experience anything else but war. Some of these conflicts change their nature over time, new actors and factors add to those already existing, some may leave the scene (Savimbi in Angola!), and determining the origin of a conflict sometimes becomes just an academic exercise. Frequently, some of the most important features of contemporary warfare in Africa (in terms of material and human costs) are rather those factors that prolong conflicts.

Conventional wisdom about violent conflict in Africa is still dictated by either ideological preferences or narrow institutional interests. The dominance of two competing explanatory approaches – 'poverty' and 'greed' – is not reflecting accurately what happens on the ground. Current discourses about conflict prevention might lead to very mechanical and technocratic responses to varying challenges, exacerbating an already inherent tendency in the aid business: over-simplification. However, the biggest flaw in technocratic official development assistance (ODA) related thinking is the focus on the nation-state, when an essential part of the problem (and maybe even the solution) might be found on two other levels: in the local and the sub-regional arenas.

Familiar conflict escalation patterns might stress this problem. In fact, African (and most other) conflicts spread in two ways:

- horizontally (territorial spread) – the crisis in the Great Lakes region is felt several thousand miles away from Lake Kivu; the Ivorian crisis has, within a few months, affected the whole sub-region of West Africa; and
- vertically (in intensity) – the Rwandan genocide might not be the last on the continent. Extreme forms of violence (e.g. atrocities in the Sierra Leone civil war) and a growing number of victims in, by definition, local conflicts (e.g. in Nigeria) attest to this.

Yet, the responses by the international community do not sufficiently address escalation patterns and the endurance of conflict. Additionally, new actors (e.g. private security firms¹) and new arenas of the political game (e.g. large-scale refugee camps) emerge – policy-makers and academia alike will have to react to this. A growing literature on so-called 'new wars' tries to reflect these tendencies while it is not always clear how 'new', or rather, for how long undetected the phenomena really are. Typically, the Angolan civil war was predominantly

¹ Contrasting positions can be found in Musah and Fayemi 2000, Cilliers and Cornwell 1999, Lock 1998, Howe 1998, and *West Africa*, 18-24 September 2000.

interpreted as a proxy war during the 1980s (that is during the East-West bloc confrontation), and as an example for the 'economy of war'-thesis in the late 1990s.

Finally, one of the main shortcomings of external involvement is its short-sighted 'crisis response' nature; instead, what is needed is a thorough understanding of an adapted 'peace order'.

This paper argues that there are roughly four problems that need to be addressed if conflict prevention policy in Africa is to lead to more positive results in the future:

1. In academia and practice there is a dangerous mix-up of types of conflict causes: While an understanding of 'root causes' or their main expressions is vital for a correct analysis, an understanding of escalation patterns and a correct assessment of 'conflict prolonging (or sustaining) factors' should inform concrete short-term action.
2. There is nearly no common understanding of conflict causes by international actors – leading to incoherent, uncoordinated and therefore ineffective action.
3. There is a lack of vision (locally and internationally) about the final goals when engaging in conflict prevention. Without a holistic view of African societies' capacities to live in peace with themselves and their neighbours, any well-meant action might simply fail to produce effects.
4. There is an exaggerated focus on the African nation-state. A parallel shift of perspective in conflict analysis, prevention and resolution from the national towards the local and the sub-regional level is necessary. A good number of current conflicts have trans-boundary effects, but start locally (Engel/Mehler 2005).

This paper is organised as follows: Following this introduction, the second section argues for a correct differentiation of conflict causes – stressing the importance of conflict prolonging factors. These are specified in some detail in the third section. The fourth section deals with 'official' conceptions of (African) conflicts and conflict prevention by some major actors – showing that the 'conventional wisdom' is not even a homogeneous one. Finally, section five, by drawing conclusions and giving some perspectives, develops core aspects of a practical and heuristic leitmotiv helping to situate preventive strategies and activities in the coordinate system of a forward-looking approach of contributing to a 'peace order' or 'structural stability'. It argues for re-assessing the role of the nation-state level as much in analysis as in practical aid, calling attention towards the local and sub-regional levels.

2. The Case for Adequate Differentiation of Conflict Causes

The state of knowledge on the causation of African conflicts in academia is far from being satisfactory. Different schools of thought still tend to ignore each other and follow incomplete sets of research questions: Some of the rare researchers working on African conflicts worked with the 'universalist' approaches of peace research developed mainly in the context of the Cold War and the OECD world (Reychler 1997). Others picked very specific segments of explanatory factors: either the result of ethno-regionally, economically or politically motivated excessive demands to increasingly inefficient governments (Zartman 1985, Joseph 1999). Poverty is a simplistic (but welcome) explanation for violent conflict offered by some researchers.² Failure of clientelist integration after flawed reforms of neo-patrimonial systems is still another offered explanation.³ More complex schemes distinguish a) conflict patterns associated with the competition over the control of the state and rare resources, from b) calls for autonomy/independence or other demands by particular social groups, also adding the historical factor of the end of the East-West confrontation with its consequential loss of patronage once exerted by external powers (leading to the destabilisation of some authoritarian regimes).⁴ The author believes that an even more differentiated list of problem areas as manifestations of highly abstract root causes (developed elsewhere, see van de Goor et al. 2001) is needed in order to distil typical chains of causation – from 'root causes', aggravating or accelerating factors to conflict prolonging (or sustaining) factors and triggers:

1. **root causes of conflict** are underlying characteristics arising from historical dominant economical, political and social institutions, practices or other dispositions;
2. **aggravating or accelerating factors** refer to aspects and circumstances, which contribute to a (re-)escalation of a conflict situation. These factors emerge medium-term;
3. **conflict prolonging (or sustaining) factors** contribute to the predominance of logics of war over logics of peace after an escalation of violence has taken place. Sustaining war efforts essentially depend on economic, institutional and ideological rationales;
4. **triggers** aren't the (root) causes of conflict but constitute more proximate events or factors and create situations, in which a violent escalation of conflict occurs.

² See the largely economist contributions in *Journal of African Economies*, 9 (2000) 3 (Special Issue/Economic Commission for Africa Policy Issue: Conflict); and Solomon 1999. For Copson (1994), poverty is a 'contributing factor', while the main reason of conflict are varying forms of contradictions between state and society.

³ See Allen 1999 (with a discussion of further explanatory elements: new barbarism; economies of war; globalisation approaches; approaches using social, cultural and individual factors) and Schlichte 1996. On neo-patrimonialism see van de Walle 2001, Chabal and Daloz 1999.

⁴ Matthies 1998 highlights additional problems of nation-building and elements of group mobilisation. Patterns of mobilisation are important as well for Lemarchand 2001.

One example might be enough to explain the need to differentiate conflict causes⁵: A typical (*root*) *cause* of violent conflict in Africa south of the Sahara is the emergence of an exclusive government elite: It can be characterised briefly: Key decision-making positions in the presidency, cabinet, parliament, military and judiciary do not include representatives of major identity groups. In addition, most jobs in the civil service, police force and army are reserved for members of one or two specific groups. Different dynamics may start from this point of departure: 1. A continuation of the main conflict aided by institutional devices excluding minorities (e.g. high thresholds to win mandates in Parliament); those could become a *conflict-prolonging factor* (although not necessarily on a violent level); 2. There could be a tendency to even further contract the political arena, particularly when economic crisis affects a given state-apparatus. Already privileged circles usually have better means to keep their jobs, privileges, access to opportunities etc. in times of crisis – and exclusion could become a rational strategy by those. But exclusion is a radical strategy and is likely to be countered by equally radical strategies on the part of those excluded. If the formal political process does not provide for a solution, the excluded elite groups will tend to initiate attempts to overthrow the regime (Burundi is a classical example). In particular, formerly privileged elite groups pushed aside or prosecuted by a new elite will more likely be tempted by violent adventures (the Yakoma followers of ex-president Kolingba in Central African Republic under the rule of Ange-Félix Patassé offer a typical case).

What then are the patterns of escalation? At first, a specific group might simply enjoy privileged access to strategic positions. Gradually, the government payroll is 'homogenised'; and only one group is left represented (example: the last years of Habyarimana rule in Rwanda when not only Hutu, but particularly those from his home region, occupied most important positions) – this clearly represents an *aggravating factor*. If elections are held, marginal groups vote unsuccessfully for opposition parties headed by excluded elite groups. These leaders go underground and organise armed challenges to the incumbent regime. Disloyal conduct increases and leads to further polarisation. A composite power-base of the regime might split, leaving only a minority in power (arguably this happened in the last year of Patassé's reign in Central African Republic after the forced defection of then chief of staff Gen. Bozizé). In the final stage, pogroms and ethnic cleansing begin to occur, representing the *triggering event* and the entry into a new level of escalation.

⁵ The CPN 'practical guide' (op. cit.) distinguishes 17 so-called problem-areas with respective escalation patterns.

3. Conflict Prolonging Factors

The mainstream thinking of conflict resolution believes that conflicts attain a moment of 'ripeness for resolution' (Zartman 1985). But these moments arrive late, if at all. In many contemporary conflicts, de-escalation is frequently merely temporary, while the antagonists prepare for the next battle. Most of the factors shortly presented hereafter have obviously gained in importance during the last decade. One very influential approach is the 'political economy of war' approach. In an extreme form, which is its 'greed' hypothesis propagated by several writings of the economists Collier and Hoeffler, this approach is ultimately reduced to the personal ambitions of warlords and political entrepreneurs. In resource-rich African states there are indeed possibilities to fund war efforts or to make 'easy money' under war conditions. But curiously enough, 'greed' (meaning the search for opportunities for predation, like the control of primary commodity exports) is portrayed as the (major) conflict cause, while it should appropriately be classified as a prolonging factor or 'fuel' of conflict. Several writers with an African studies background have heavily criticised the Collier/Hoeffler approach. Marchal and Messiant (2002) have decried the inherent narrow perspective and methodological flaws. Mkandawire (2002: 190) reminds us that

"Constraining rebel actions for the pursuit of material interests leaves out a whole range of things that drive rebel movements – 'Passions', moral agency, 'false consciousness' – which are important in untangling the many complex conflicts afflicting Africa today."

Collier et al. (2003) have now differentiated their thoughts, but still remain in a largely econometric rationale (as criticized by Lemarchand 2003). Richards and Vlassenroot (2002) show how a sociological approach inspired by Durkheim would, for instance, shift the 'exaltation' aspect of African conflicts to the foreground.

In sum, there is reason to believe that economic factors are central to understanding the endurance of conflicts (although they are not the only ones, see the institutional factor of electoral rules above), but they do not necessarily reveal anything about the emergence of conflict. And: By no means should economic factors be reduced to the 'greed' explanation. A small overview of a selection of typical war-prolonging factors in African circumstances might support this argument:

3.1. Oil and Warfare

There are quite a few oil-producing countries in Africa that have experienced violent conflict. Oil resources/revenues – and this is a more complex argument than the 'greed' thesis – can become a motive to circumvent democracy, since governments gain far more from rents and royalties than from taxes by their own ordinary citizens (Herb 2003, Moore 2004, Ross 2001,

2003a/b, Snyder/Bhavnani 2004). Thus, they tend to be less responsive to demands for participation (virtually all oil economies in Africa: Libya, Algeria, Gabon, Angola, Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Sudan, and as a newcomer: Chad). In this sense they can be at the origin of violent conflict. More often, however, oil resources rather serve to prolong conflicts:

- Royalties or other oil-related transfers can be used to buy arms or reinforce military capacities to continue violent conflict (Chad, Angola, Sudan).
- Oil producers in conflict zones get involved in ongoing wars. Their premises are used for military interventions (Sudan), they may side willingly or unwillingly with conflict parties (Congo-Brazzaville).

Despite the generally assumed 'resource curse' or the 'paradox of plenty' (which often refers to oil besides other natural resources like diamonds etc.) one has to stress the fact, that,

"whether oil or other resources turn out to be beneficial or detrimental to a country's socio-economic and political development depends on a fairly dynamic and complex interplay of contextual variables" (Basedau 2005: 22).

The 'resource curse' is not destiny, as Ross (2003a) and Basedau (2005) point out. Country specific and resource specific conditions have to be taken into account.

3.2. Illegal Trafficking of Precious Resources

Precious resources, like diamonds, gold, hardwood or other rare natural resources are transiting national frontiers illegally. Warlords are generally military entrepreneurs in search of control of the production sites and trade routes of these commodities. This, today, is conventional wisdom. However, trade profits essentially permit the continuation of politico-commercial strategies, they rarely represent 'square one' in a complicated game.⁶ Governments in weak states tend to be corrupted slowly, but pervasively by criminal networks and might become actors in violent conflict (Debiel 2002). Once again: it is misleading to start conflict analysis only with the effects of illegal trafficking. It might be essential to address them, but this needs to be done, as well, by looking into the conditions of their emergence (including the weakness of the African state). Again context matters.

⁶ Addison, Le Billon and Murshed (2003) find that in several cases under scrutiny, actors prefer low intensity conflict to outright victory, minimising direct losses and increasing the direct gains (booty).

3.3. Small Arms and War as a Profession

Small arms are available at low cost in expanding zones around escalated conflicts. The most common approach to the problem is the regulation of arms exports from Northern countries. This conventional way of addressing small arms proliferation is of limited value: Small arms and ammunition are produced as well in other, including African countries (e.g. RSA). More importantly, the destruction of weapons necessitates their prior collection, an activity which frequently demands material input by donor organisations ('arms for cash'), which in turn may be an incentive for becoming a fighter in the first place ('demobilisation rent'): arms collection, demobilisation and reintegration schemes might have perverse (conflict prolonging) effects, if beneficiaries are exclusively those who took up arms in the first place. In enduring conflicts, becoming a fighter is – on an individual level – a rational alternative to less promising opportunities on the labour market, particularly for male youth. Fighters may not necessarily be paid, but live from armed blackmail and looting. The traumatising effects of violence is particularly harmful for children and adolescents. This may be the starting point for a 'career' from victim to perpetrator and thus a 'conflict prolonging factor' or a 'conflict reproducing factor'.

3.4. Declining States

Some African states were simply juridical fictions when they became independent, others turned gradually into façade states. This is not only a conflict cause, it also has consequences for conflict resolution: In the absence of responsible governments there are often no credible partners for peace negotiations – a conflict prolonging factor. Another aspect of conflict prolongation is the gradual replacement of the – at least claimed – monopoly of violence by a multiplication of actors in continued "need" to prove their capacity of violence in order to command respect and allegiance. The case of Somalia remains an extreme case, where the absence of a state – despite numerous efforts to support local 'peace constituencies' – clearly proved to be to the detriment of peace in large parts of the country.

3.5. Diaspora and Other Factors

The existence of a diaspora sustaining war efforts from abroad might be an additional conflict prolonging factor, as could be certain ideologies, revenge cultures or religions. Some conflict prolonging factors are associated with the aid business (Uvin 1998, 2001; Anderson 1999). This enumeration is certainly not exhaustive.

Conflict prolonging factors might be more visible, more salient to those concerned and more modifiable than 'root causes' as argued above. And since the endurance of war creates im-

mense costs, there is every reason to deal with these causes in a much more systematic way than experienced thus far. On the other hand, there is no reason to believe that violence attributable directly to 'root causes' would simply disappear when the 'fuel' is taken out of a conflict arena. After the outbreak of violence, the answer seems to be clear: Dealing first with prolonging factors and addressing root causes immediately afterwards. It would be better still to prevent triggering events first, but they can hardly be predicted.

4. The Diverging and Simplistic Understanding of Conflict Causes by International Actors

The practitioner's understanding of violent conflict is frequently informed by official perspectives. However, we observe severe flaws and distinctive variations in the analysis of the causes of violent conflict in Africa by major external actors which could lead to short-sighted and contradictory policies by national governments and international organisations.

At first sight, there are obvious reasons why different actors should have different perceptions of conflict causes: those have to fit their 'Weltbild' (ideology), their mandate and prior positions defended in their respective arenas of action. A closer look reveals that there are quite some contradictions between governments, but even between departments of one and the same government. This chapter does not, however, aim at explaining the behaviour of international actors or unfold their complex decision-making processes. The objective is a more limited one: comparing the (official) explanations of conflict causes with each other and pointing to the dangers of inherent flaws. Instead of rational analysis, superficial and contradictory perceptions of conflicts in Africa seem to influence policies of most external actors. Some typical positions of certain major actors should be briefly reported and commented, although there are difficulties in finding texts that can at least roughly be compared and are significant in themselves: Not all the actors have similarly grounded policy papers; some address conflict causes only in an implicit way. Very often the policy is outlined without a reference to some prior analytical work. Some of the policy papers and programmatic declarations used here are not Africa-specific (focusing on the developing world), but certainly cover the African continent – which raises the question of whether they are specific enough to address concrete conflicts.⁷

⁷ It will be focused on the international donors. Further research should address the conceptualisation of violent conflicts done by the African Union, subregional organisations and major INGOs.

4.1. The United Nations

With regard to the continuum conflict prevention – peace-enforcement, the United Nations can claim considerable authority worldwide (Barnett 2001, Hampson/Malone 2002, Sriram/Wermester 2003). The United Nations' Secretary General has published one of the most influential reports on the causes of conflict in Africa (Annan 1998). He stresses historical legacies (colonial frontiers, political legacies and commercial relations established under colonial rule, support for authoritarian regimes during the Cold War era), juxtaposes internal factors (nature of power, winner-takes-all systems, politicisation of ethnicity, etc.) and external factors (economic interests – competition for resources, destabilisation by neighbouring states). He cites effects of war economies and adds some secondary factors in 'particular situations' (land right problem). This is certainly one of the most comprehensive and differentiated approaches to be found in policy papers worldwide. Most UN organisations refer to this document and apparently do not need their own concept.⁸ Meanwhile UN Secretary General Annan has made the prevention of armed conflict one of the top priorities of his second term. His *Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict* calls for a paradigm shift from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention of conflict. The report marks a beginning in the UN's willingness and development agenda to address the deep-rooted socio-economic, cultural, environmental, institutional and other structural causes that often underlie the immediate political symptoms of conflicts.

4.2. The European Union

The EU has rhetorically endorsed conflict prevention relatively early on (in 1995), particularly with regard to Africa.

Drawing on Council Conclusions from 1998 the EU's Conflict Prevention Network cited 1) imbalance of political, socio-economic or cultural opportunities among different identity groups, 2) lack of democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of governance, 3) absence of opportunities for the peaceful conciliation of group interests and for bridging dividing lines

⁸ Under the agenda title "New Partnership for Africa's Development: progress in implementation and international support: causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa" the United Nations General Assembly presented on September 5, 2003 a follow-up report "Implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and development in Africa". Here the UN addresses specific follow-up actions taken since 1998 and identifies further challenges and obstacles for the implementation of the recommendations made by the Secretary-General. (<http://www.un.dk/doc/a58352.pdf>, access 12/22/2004). The UNDP has commissioned an interesting independent study (Wood 2001), updated in 2003. In the absence of a more official paper the Annan-Report 1998 and its follow-ups seems to be its current position. Current research is been done by the "War-Torn-Societies Transition Programm" (WSP-TP) (<http://www.wsp-international.org/index.htm>).

between different identity groups, and 4) lack of an active and organised civil society as root causes of violent conflict.⁹ The EU Commission in its 2001 communication on conflict prevention (not Africa-specific) rather elusively calls for an ‘enhanced common analysis of root causes of conflict and of signs of emerging conflict’. This sounds as if there would be a growing uncertainty about these causes of conflict. The text adds that

“[p]overty, economic stagnation, uneven distribution of resources, weak social structures, undemocratic governance, systematic discrimination, oppression of the rights of minorities, destabilising effects of refugee flows, ethnic antagonisms, religious and cultural intolerance, social injustice and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and small arms are factors which aggravate conflict.”¹⁰

In a Council Common Position, economic factors (lack of integration in the global economy, illegal exploitation and trade in high value commodities, illegal exploitation of natural resources) are highlighted, at the same time the security sector and the spread of small arms are as well cited (Council of the European Union 2001a). And finally – also coming from the Council side – the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, an initiative of the Swedish Presidency, is not proposing any conflict causes or analytical framework (Council of the European Union 2001b). This short description shows that the EU, today, is far away from the assertiveness expressed earlier with regard to a comprehensive set of conflict causes.¹¹ More (implied) conceptualised work has been done in the area of peace-keeping.¹²

⁹ Lund et al. 1999. The Commission insisted on these four root causes while the authors developed 16 (later 17) more down-to-earth ‘problem areas’ to focus on different conflict causes. An electronic format of this guide was left off in a draft stage when the CPN contract was discontinued at the end of 2001 and definitely buried by the Commission in early 2003, see van de Goor et al. 2001.

¹⁰ See European Commission 2001. In its report on this communication the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Parliament (Rapporteur: Joost Lagendijk) considers that ‘a further step could be taken by assessing and preventing the impact that certain major decisions adopted in the framework of the common policies of the Union could have as direct or indirect causes of certain conflicts, namely by distorting or even annihilating the economic and social structure of the poorest countries’ (A5-0394/2001, RR\302075 EN.doc).

¹¹ A EU Presidency Statement on conflicts in Africa at the UN security council (May 30, 2003) confirms the unspecified concern with all sorts of conflict causes put on the same level of explanation: ‘Identifying and addressing the multidimensional root causes of conflict in Africa is another important element in the long fight towards peace and stability in the region. Dealing with issues like, inter alia, socio-economic inequities and inequalities, systematic ethnic discrimination, denial of human rights, disputes over political participation or long-standing grievances over land, the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons and the illegal exploitation of natural resources is of critical importance in the process of moving from conflict management to prevention and final resolution’ (<http://europa-eu-un.org/article.asp?id=2430>; access 04/08/2003). To deepen the confusion on the existing papers see the “European Commission Check-list for Root Causes of Conflict”. Here the EC has developed a check-list for root causes/early warning indicators with 8 subject headings and several sub-points (http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/cpcm/cp/list.htm, access 02/25/2005).

4.3. The World Bank

The World Bank has for a long time preferred to work on conflict consequences (only in post-conflict scenarios) and not on conflict causes. Nevertheless, towards the late 1990s the Bank has redefined its role and shifted its approach from one that focused on rebuilding infrastructure to one that seeks to understand the root causes of conflict, to integrate a sensitivity to conflict in Bank activities and to promote assistance that minimizes the potential causes of conflict.

A workshop report under the inspiration of the Bank's Post-Conflict Unit in 1998 cited 'inequity, exclusion, and indignity' as conflict causes (World Bank 1998), while some economist researchers associated with the World Bank have developed the famous 'greed and grievance' formula, attributing the causes of a high proportion of violent conflicts to the personal greed of rebels and warlords (Collier/Hoeffler 2000; see above). Separately, a somewhat particular focus was on environmental causes and consequences of conflict (World Bank 2001). Meanwhile, at the turn of the millennium the World Bank officially concentrated (again) on its mandate: "Although poverty is not the only cause of conflict, development can enhance resilience to violent conflict and address some of the structural causes of conflict". While socio-economic factors dominate in this perspective, the presentation of conflict causes is in the end also highly contradictory. In a task force report on 'Low Income Countries under Stress' (LICUS) the World Bank identified several types of countries with weak governance all more or less closely linked to recent episodes of violent conflict, but without making conflict prevention or peace-building the ultimate aim of engagement (World Bank 2002).

The Bank's more recent report "Breaking the Conflict Trap" argues against a greed-based interpretation of rebellion. "Loot is not usually the root motivation for conflict, but it may become critical to its perpetuation, giving rise to the conflict trap" (Collier et al 2003: 79). This acknowledgment of a separate meaning of conflict prolonging factors deserves recognition. The report claims inter alia that stagnant or declining low-income countries face a high risk of conflict and that countries in the first decade of post-conflict peace face exceptionally high risks to fall back into conflict. It is difficult to escape the conflict trap – conflict breeds conflict: „First and foremost, post-conflict countries face a high risk of reverting to conflict, especially during the first five years. Post-conflict countries often confront massive human,

¹² One has to highlight the November 2003 General Affairs Council approval of a draft decision to use the European Development Fund (EDF) to create a *Peace Facility for Africa* in line with the plea of the African Union. The EU will provide 250 million Euro for this purpose. Its intention is clear: "A contribution to the task of addressing the root causes of insecurity in Africa" (European Commission 2004, see also Faria 2004: 5, 32 f.). The final step in this context was the announcement on May 25, 2004 that the African Peace Facility to support African Peace keeping missions is operationalized.

physical, economic, social and institutional dislocation, and the choices they must make are correspondingly more difficult" (World Bank 2004: 14).

The solution proposed in 2003 sounded straightforward: the effect of a package of policy reform and increased aid on the average aid-recipient country would reduce the risk of conflict (without giving convincing explanations for this and obviously offering good additional advice). But the assertiveness is in decline: "There is no consensus, let alone best practices, on how to integrate the conflict nexus or the key elements of conflict-affected PRSP processes." The World Bank begins to consider its own homework: "Economic policies also need to be more flexible, taking into account the specific constraints resulting from conflict and the primary objective of ensuring peace and political stability" (World Bank 2004: 14-15).

Recent efforts by the Bank to support political change by promoting reform-oriented actors, institution building, good governance, measures to improve transparency in the trade of energy (oil and gas) and other commodities that are often linked to conflicts (diamonds, timber, precious metals) show a growing sensitivity to the political economy of conflict. Those are primarily managed and designed through the Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit and the Development Research Group.¹³

However, poverty remains an important starting point of the conceptual reflections, although in a complex manner:

"Countries affected by conflict face a two-way relationship between conflict and poverty—pervasive poverty makes societies more vulnerable to violent conflict, while conflict itself creates more poverty. At the same time, conflict has a negative effect on the ability of countries to formulate poverty reduction strategies" (World Bank 2004: 14).

The World Bank, by implementing its Operational Policy/Bank Procedures 2.30 (OP/BP2.30), puts a sharper focus on the need to adapt Poverty Reduction Strategy processes and best practices to take account of the special circumstances of countries where conflict is a key development issue (World Bank 2004: 1). Hence the World Bank increased its interests in gaining a better understanding of the rapidly-evolving field of conflict prevention in its many aspects and across its many institutional actors.

This conclusion is not necessarily in opposition to another conclusion: One has to emphasize the missing link in the World Bank's research activities on its own reform programme, the PRS, structural adjustment policy and conflict. Existing PRSPs for a large number of conflict

¹³ One also has to consider the research done by the Governance of Natural Resources Project, based at the Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW), Norway, a collaborative effort of PRIO and World Bank (http://www.prio.no/page/CSCW_research_detail/CSCW_programs_projects/9649/42486.html, access 01/05/2005). See also the reflective work done by the Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, Social Development Department Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Network (World Bank 2004).

countries and weak governance environments miss to (or seldom) address the underlying root causes of violent conflicts, and the specific characteristics of poverty, related to these violent conflicts. Therefore care should be taken on alignment and harmonisation of the PRSPs and the Conflict Analysis Framework (CAF).¹⁴ It is in fact the bringing together of all its knowledge in compatible forms and their coordinated and concerned application in conflict-vulnerable societies, which is needed (Lund 2004).

4.4. OECD DAC

The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is largely a co-ordination body with no direct authority in international affairs and on Africa, but with considerable influence in the development of guidelines for action.

In its policy statement on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation on the Threshold of the 21st Century the DAC listed as sources of conflict: Problems in managing transition and rapid change, widening socio-economic disparities, the exploitation of ethnic and other differences, competition over shared resources and the legacy of violence.¹⁵ In a follower document it becomes increasingly unclear what accounts for a conflict factor or an early warning indicator.¹⁶ The more recent focus on 'poor performers', 'difficult environments' or 'difficult partnerships' by the OECD DAC deviates from the conflict analysis perspective and instead stresses the 'failing states' aspect. Indeed, the OECD DAC confesses that development constraints are poorly understood. Hence the High Level Meeting of Ministers established a 'Learning and Advisory Process' (LAP) in 2003, which integrates the European Commission, the UNDP and World Bank, to reflect jointly about development effectiveness in difficult environments. LAP seeks to contribute to an agenda of knowledge sharing and the promotion of the 'policy coherence for development' (PCD) initiative of the OECD.¹⁷ These initiatives turn explicitly against simplistic and futile theories of state deterioration and conflict (e.g. the 'resource curse'-thesis, the 'greed vs. grievance'-debate, 'conflict cycle'). They "lead

¹⁴ The research on conflict causes has been boiled down into Conflict Assessment Frameworks (CAF). These CAFs are being used by donor agencies to assess the potential for conflict in many particular countries. But they reports are not yet integrated into existing general development assistance frameworks.

¹⁵ OECD DAC 2001: 87-89. The document contains the older Guidelines Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation on the Threshold of the 21st Century (1997) as an annex.

¹⁶ OECD DAC 2001: 31-32.

¹⁷ Besides the attempts of LAP and PCD to harmonize and implement policy coherence between donor-countries and -institutions, the OECD proposes a 'developmental peacekeeping' approach and highlights – under the aegis of the 'DAC Network on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation' (CPDC) – special areas such as security sector reform, emerging issues and crisis countries, a development cooperation lens on terrorism prevention and the impacts of aid in situations of violent conflict. An enhancement of the DAC-guidelines can be expected in the near future.

to misconceived programs that may have symbolic value but little practical effect. ... The dynamics of conflict are discontinuous and sequential approaches are far less effective than “joined up” strategies that combine all policy tools in a coherent package of inducements and restraints” (OECD 2005: 6).

4.5. The G8 (and Its Africa Action Plan)

It took long until the G8 countries could agree to devote resources and efforts to helping Africa prevent and manage its conflicts in order to promote social stability and create a more enabling environment for development. At its summit in Kananaskis (Canada) in June 2002 the G8 declared its willingness to assist Africa directly by its own efforts to undertake peace support operations. Therefore a G8 Africa Action Plan was signed, unfortunately without including an agreed set of conflict causes.

Critically, the initiative sprang from African nations themselves, but African leaders bowed to Western pressure alike. The African leaders called the West’s bluff by signalling in the NEPAD-process their willingness to implement reforms. In return, it was hoped Western nations would raise the plight of Africa up their political agenda. At this point the G8 initiative stepped in.

The plan contains an initiative on peace and security. Unfortunately, it has no clear analytical basis; conflict causes have to be deducted from the objectives. The main aim of the initiative is to “provide technical and financial assistance so that, by 2010, African countries and regional and sub-regional organizations are able to engage more effectively to prevent and resolve violent conflict on the continent.” Africa, with Western help, will be encouraged to form its own peacekeeping force and to enhance general conflict management capacities. In addition the G8 pledged support for ongoing conflict management efforts in countries such as the DRC, Sudan, Angola, and Sierra Leone. However, there is no common – G8 and NEPAD – understanding of conflict causes.

The Evian Summit (France) in 2003 reiterated these commitments and focused specifically on the pledge to provide support for an African capacity for peace operations. The three-step approach intends to create a joint plan for developing African capability to undertake peace support operations, to train African peace support forces, including through the development of regional centres of excellence to train military and civilian personnel in conflict prevention and peace support, and to better coordinate peacekeeping training initiatives. Special foci were put on reducing the number of small arms circulating in Africa, helping African countries rid themselves of anti-personnel mines, getting close scrutiny of the link between conflict and pillage of natural resources, ending illicit trafficking of weapons and outlawing

mercenary activities. While all those aspects seem important, there is hardly any convincing analytical backbone for the formulation of priorities or the sequence of actions.

Some of the most powerful nation-states have developed their own concepts, although it is true that they frequently refer to the UN, the OECD DAC or the EU as common frameworks. Here too, a short oversight might highlight the distinctions:

4.6. United Kingdom

Rhetorically, conflict prevention plays a big role in the UK's policy toward Africa in particular, but also in Foreign Affairs in general (Kapila/Wermester 2002).¹⁸ There is a cross-departmental co-ordination committee between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Ministry of Defence (MOD), and the Department for International Development (DFID) in association with the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury, called Africa Conflict Prevention Pool. The official home-page entry on 'UK Conflict Prevention Initiative for Africa' is explicit. Root causes of conflict here

"include political, economic and social exclusion, poor governance and corruption, manipulation of ethnicity, and abuse of human rights. Africa also needs to address the weaknesses of its regional security structures and conflict prevention mechanisms" (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2002).¹⁹

This was not exactly the result of a consultation process initiated by DFID on behalf of the co-ordination body: DFID put a consultation document on the web titled 'the causes of conflict in Africa' in May 2001. Its consolidated version (October 2001) stressed inequality between groups, weak states and state collapse, economic decline and economic shock, 'historical factors' (history of resolving problems by violent means), and natural resource wealth as root causes of conflict. As 'secondary causes' it adds widespread unemployment, lack of education and population pressure, the abuse of ethnicity and the availability of arms, as 'tertiary causes' inter alia the regional and interlocking nature of many conflicts, 'lack of external guarantors', inadequate and inappropriate mediation and misplaced humanitarian and development assistance.²⁰ Furthermore, in spring 2001, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook stressed poverty as prime conflict cause: 'Poverty breeds conflict'.²¹ Still, with the founding

¹⁸ The UK stands out for emphasising security and reconciliation – the two peace-building categories that are non-traditional within development cooperation – as well as for its emphasis on projects that are not specific to a recipient country but are regional, global or thematic in scope (DFID 2003).

¹⁹ <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1017756005037> (access 12/22/2004).

²⁰ DFID 2001: 14-16. DFID: The causes of conflict in Africa. Consultation document, March 2001.

²¹ Robin Cook: Preventing Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa, Speech by the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, to the conference on conflict prevention in Sub-Saharan Africa, London, 26 March 2001,

of the institutional innovation (Global and Africa) *Conflict Prevention Pools* (CPP) in April 2001, a watershed in British development cooperation policy was marked. The pools are not in themselves a strategy for conflict prevention, but rather a tool for joint analysis, financing and coordination. Seen in international perspective, the system is highly innovative, and has influenced other donor governments. But, the CCP system still requires more strategic clarity.²² The UK has geographic and thematic strategies, but there seems to be a gap at both ends of the spectrum. In some cases projects lack connection to a country strategy because there is no country strategy. In other cases, there is a country strategy to which some but not all projects are linked. In yet others, a strategy can be derived from project documentation or other sources (such as interviews), but it has not been written down and formalised (DFID 2003: 30ff., Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Norway] 2004: 43). The UK also places considerable emphasis on working through both inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) and NGOs. Important points are working thematically on regional and global levels, improving policy instruments, research, and strengthening multilateral institutions. And, recently, DFID has recognized how important it is to work more effectively within weak states – again ahead of other donor organisations (DFID 2005).

In sum, in British conflict prevention policies towards Africa, there have been positive results and innovative approaches. Unfortunately, London's attempts to promote peace in Africa have been selective, inconsistent, contradictory, under-resourced, narrowly focused and pre-occupied with managing rather than preventing violent conflicts (Williams 2004b: 46-48).

4.7. United States of America

U.S. interests in Africa were for a long time considered to be commercial in essence. The September 11 aftermath is beginning to modify policy goals over time (Berman 2004, Hentz 2004), towards 'national interest' in African oil and the 'war against terrorism'. However, an official US conception of violent conflicts in Africa is still difficult to find. US Ambassador to ECOSOC, Betty King, in a statement in the General Assembly on the Causes of Conflict in Africa expressed doubts concerning the explanatory value of poverty, ethnic division, religious difference and colonial boundaries when she proposed: 'Perhaps the true cause of con-

mimeo. In surprising self-confidence he stated at the very end of his speech: 'Modern technology lets us know exactly where, when and why conflict is taking place'.

²² Examination of policy documents shows the persistence of conceptual uncertainties. Further, to have a strategy is one thing but whether it covers what it needs to is another; some strategies reveal less coherence than others, and the cycles of strategic planning and budgeting do not match. According to the 'Utstein study', the majority of British projects lack strategic connections, and if so, in many cases the links appear to be superficial and little more than pro forma (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Norway] 2004: 43).

flict in Africa is unaccountable governance'²³, but this cannot easily be taken as a balanced policy statement. Other lists of conflict causes are broad and unspecific: In its presentation of their Greater Horn of Africa Initiative proposal for fiscal year 1998 the USAID offers a plain statement without any further explanation 'The root causes of conflict are often political, economic or environmental'.²⁴ In a 'conflict code' the agency defines conflict as

*"a struggle over values or claims to status, power (e.g., through the politicization of identity) and scarce yet economically viable resources (e.g., land, water, natural resources, minerals and food)..."*²⁵

More recently, in 2002, an Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) has been established, that should, inter alia, develop vulnerability analyses and assessment tools. It might not be surprising that USAID in a list of initiatives foreseen for the fiscal year 2003 wants to focus on those natural resources that illicitly generate finances to fuel conflict, such as diamonds, timber and gold, while the conflict-related effects of (legal) oil production are left out.²⁶

On August 20, 2003 the State Department and USAID published their "Strategic Plan" for the fiscal years 2004-2009.²⁷ Guided by the prior idea to protect US national interests, the strategy stresses the objective to "avert and resolve local and regional conflicts to preserve peace". By "building the foundations for stability and addressing the root causes of conflict" development assistance shall be provided. The strategy defines causes of conflict as following:

"Instability and conflict among states arise from diverse causes. Ethnic hatred, unequal economic opportunities, and political discrimination within states can lead to instability and refugee flows that spill across borders. Societies that lack means of dissent can nurture radical ideologies that appeal those who feel threatened by existing norms and arrangements. Often, legitimate grievances provide opportunities for unscrupulous or shortsighted leaders who ex-

²³ Ambassador Betty King: Statement in the General Assembly on the Causes of Conflict and Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa, November 1, 2000 (http://www.un.int/usa/00_155.htm, access 12/23/2004).

²⁴ <http://www.usaid.gov/pubs/cp98/afr/zz-ghai.htm>. (access 03/16/2005).

²⁵ <http://www.afr-sd.org/CrisisPreparedness/USAIDcode.pdf> (access 12/23/2004). USAID has an internal analytical tool ('Conflict Vulnerability Analysis: Issues, Tools and Responses'; July 2000) that could not be procured; it is unclear whether this tool offers a common analytical framework for US actors in this field of engagement. Some speeches by USAID administrators touching on the issue of conflict prevention can be found on the web, they could not easily replace an outright policy.

²⁶ http://www.usaid.gov/pubs/cbj2003/cent_prog/dcha/cmm.html (access 12/23/2004). This again becomes evident by a speech given by Charles R. Snyder, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, to the Pacific Council on International Policy, November 17, 2003, titled "U.S.-African Partnership of the 21st Century" (www.state.gov/p/af/rls/rm/26772.htm [access 12/23/2004]).

²⁷ <http://www.state.gov/m/rm/rls/dosstrat/2004/23503.htm> (access 03/01/2005).

exploit and exacerbate tensions. Stable relations among states also can be threatened by changes in their relative wealth, power, and ambitions."²⁸

Although the official papers portrays the US focus on conflict resolution and regional stability, the real impetus of Washington stays clear: In the early years of this Millennium, the US policy towards Africa remains defined by exogenous factors. Africa's place in US policy remains distant and marginalized. However, Africa has gained strategic importance for the US simply because of its oil reserves, and Africa is critical to the American war on terrorism.²⁹ Africa's conflicts aren't ignored, but the attention they get, are framed by Washington's war on terrorism. The "Strategic Plan for FY 2004-2009" emphasizes that development assistance "must be fully aligned with U.S. foreign policy". The plan leaves no doubts, that the US's own security has the highest priority in relation to Africa. This policy rewards friends and allies of the US while other African states have to cope with less and less financial support from the US.³⁰ This suggests that a sober conflict analysis quickly shifts to the background when short-term "national interests" dominate the decision-making process.

4.8. France

France can be regarded as the nation-state in Europe with the best information network, influence and interests in security matters on the African continent. However, the paradigm of conflict prevention was never very prominent in Paris.

²⁸ <http://www.state.gov/m/rm/rls/dosstrat/2004/23503.htm> (access 12/23/2004).

²⁹ See speech given by Edward Royce, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives (US Government 2001).

³⁰ In June 2003, Washington announced the East African Counterterrorism Initiative (EACTI), aimed at increasing regional counterterrorism capacities. A package of \$ 100 million was allocated to this initiative over a period of 15 months. In the same period the US got involved in the Sahel-zone (Mali, Mauritania, Chad, Niger) with its military assistance programme Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI). The PSI was designed to combat smuggling, international crime and terrorism, to improve boarder control- and combat capacities, and to serve as a buffer zone between the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. In 2004 the Department of State funded the \$ 7,75 million initiative with its peace keeping funds. However, the emphasis of both regional initiatives are on 'offensive cooperation' and have no intention of structural crises prevention. EACTI and PSI are indicatives of the importance the US attributes to counterterrorism in comparison to other aims of its Africa policy (e.g. the new ACOTA programme received \$ 10 million for 2002). The regional integration of security forces in a boundless war on terror claims role-model character for the US: Washington can abandon long-term deployment of its own military forces (Bachmann 2004: 4). The US initiatives within the scope of the G8 Action plan makes another hint in that direction. At the G8-summit on Sea Island (June 2004) the U.S. announced it would develop a new, five years, \$ 600 million international peace initiative to help train and equip foreign forces for peace keeping missions (75.000 troops). The funding for the largely at Africa aimed 'Global Peace Operations Initiative' (GPOI) was secured for 2005, but it is unlikely that the Congress will give transfer authority next year (CRS Report for Congress 2005, United States Institute for Peace 2004, and <http://www.effectivepeacekeeping.org/docs/Jan05-GPOI-update.pdf> (access 02/02/2005).

There is no freely available French policy paper on the causes of violent conflict in Africa – for a long period of time only some relevant speeches by former Ministers Josselin and Védérine could be found on the home-page of the Quai d’Orsay. However, the Neo-Gaullist foreign minister de Villepin has made crisis response in Africa one of his corner-stones of France’s foreign policy after the intervention in Côte d’Ivoire (November 2002). In a speech at the “Institut des hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale” in June 13, 2003 he once again stressed military and reactive aspects of French policy, while he noted in a highly unspecified way: “The relaunch of the development effort remains an essential condition for the return to peace.”³¹

This could suggest different things: a refusal to simplify or to conceptualise what is largely a situational policy, hidden agendas or simply a gap in paradigm reception. The government’s strategies to counter violent conflict referred to in those speeches is evidently most concerned with crisis reaction (African peace-keeping/‘Recamp’), and not with structural conflict prevention.

Although France “wants not just to act in response to the crises, but be more effective in preventing and resolving them by defining a joint approach”³², there is wide discrepancy between rhetoric and action in Paris’ policies towards the continent (Krosiak 2004: 80). Once more, recent initiatives show that France focuses its efforts on post-conflict activities in contrast to the expressed political will to replace a ‘thinking exclusively geared to short-term efficacy by a vision, by more foresight’.³³ The recent violent crises in Côte d’Ivoire and Togo – both harmful to French interests, but apparently not expected in Paris – suggest that the analytical capacities with regard to conflict prevention are limited.

4.9. Germany

Finally, Germany is only starting to consider itself a global foreign policy player, Berlin would not regard its own policy towards Africa as particularly important. However, when taking all financial contributions in multilateral frameworks into account, Germany remains an important actor. German conflict prevention in the 1990s remained an idea in search of a strategy (Matthies 1999, Thiel 2000), but since the beginning of the new millennium this

³¹ <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/actu/article.gb.asp?ART=35387> (access 12/22/2004).

³² President Chirac at the “Twenty-second Summit of the Heads of State of Africa and France. Statements made by M. Jaques Chirac, President of The Republic, during his joint press conference with M. Paul Biya, President of Cameroun, M. Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, and M. Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General, Paris, 21. 2. 2003, <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/actu/bulletin.gb.asp?liste=20030225.gb.html&submit.x=6&submit.y=10#Chapitre1> (access 12/22/2004).

³³ See speech given by President Chirac at the “First Meeting of the Forum for the Partnership with Africa” on November 10, 2003, <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/actu/bulletin.gb.asp?liste=20031118.gb.html&submit.x=11&submit.y=17#Chapitre1>, (access 12/22/2004).

statement is no longer tenable. Rhetorically, conflict (or crisis) prevention has become one of the most important objectives of its Africa policy (Matthies 2004: 153, Mehler 2002a).³⁴ And with regard to the 'Comprehensive Concept of the Federal Government on Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peace-Building' (April 2000), the 'Action Plan Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peace-Building' (May 2004) and the establishment of the sector program on crisis prevention and conflict management from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ),³⁵ one has to acknowledge: contrary to Paris and Washington, the German government made big efforts to formalize its conflict prevention policy. Additionally, the BMZ has sharpened the focus on prevention in its planning procedures by using an extensive set of crisis indicators (catalogue for crisis indicators) designed to detect the need for preventive measures early on, so that programmes and project portfolios can be adapted to these needs (Spelten 2004: 172 f.).³⁶

Berlin has made crisis prevention a guideline for, and a task that involves all fields of, national policy. But, although progress in the German conflict prevention policy can be detected, the Government still lacks to meet its own claim in terms of practical and conceptual implementation.

In its more general (not Africa-specific) policy paper on conflict prevention, the government adopts a distinction of structural and procedural conflict causes (without naming them).³⁷ In

³⁴ The renewed red-green coalition agreement of October 2002 emphasises conflict prevention as one major objective of German development assistance (www.bundesregierung.de/Regierung/Koalitionsvertrag-I.-Praeambel-1766/IX.-Gerechte-Globalisierung-De.htm ; access 03/14/2005).

³⁵ The sector program should develop concepts and instruments for implementation in focus countries. This sector program was very active and commissioned numerous studies on a broad range of subjects related to conflict.

³⁶ With the establishment of the Civil Peace Service (CPS; (Ziviler Friedensdienst: ZFD) in 1999 a completely new instrument was created. Furthermore the Government has established the Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze (ZIF). Both ZIF and ZFD provide further education and training on conflict prevention so that appropriately trained and qualified experts can be deployed to assist groups, communities and governments in conflict to develop their capacities to handle conflicts non-violently (Fleischmann 2004, Plattform Zivile Konfliktbearbeitung 2002, Plattform Zivile Konfliktbearbeitung 2003). Within the framework of the Working Group on Development and Peace (FriEnt), the Government, church and non-state executing agencies and political foundations are intensifying exchange, discussing concrete conceptual and methodological developments and exploring possibilities for improving mutual consultation, cooperation and coordination. Acknowledging the fact, that a multi-dimensional approach is essential to counter the challenges by implementing durable peace, FriEnt is an instrument of addressing the problems of multi-layered cooperation between ministries and departments of very different institutions. But cooperation at working level, especially between ministries, is insufficient (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Norway) 2004: 40).

³⁷ Comprehensive Concept of the Federal Government on Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peace-Building (updated in December 2002); <http://www.auswaertiges->

its 'Africa concept' the Foreign office vaguely names the erosion of the state from within due to HIV/AIDS, natural disasters, demographic pressure and artificial boundaries as well as politics of identity as parts of the conflict potential in Africa.³⁸ Another paper cites

"poverty and economic stagnation or even regression, gross inequalities, political oppression and systematic discrimination of minorities, the arbitrary use of power and anarchy, intolerance and ignorance, the lack of structures based on the rule of law, free media and a strong civil society"

as structural conflict causes.³⁹ A policy paper on conflict prevention by the ministry of cooperation does not analyse conflict causes, but in its programmatic part it emphasises human rights, social justice, rule of law, participatory decision-making, protection of natural resources, opportunities for development and mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of conflicts as essential categories. Implicitly, their absence or violation could be regarded as the conflict causes identified by the ministry. More implicit judgements are contained in explanations on the German contribution to the Joint Africa/G8 Plan to enhance African capabilities to undertake peace support operations, adopted at the G8-summit in Evian.⁴⁰ Further bits and pieces are thereby added to form a still incoherent German policy towards conflicts in Africa.

The 'Action Plan Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peace-Building' (May 2004) stresses the need to establish stable state structures (rule of law, democracy, human rights and security), to create the potential for peace within civil society, the media, cultural affairs and education, further to safeguard people's opportunities in life by taking appropriate measures in the fields of business, society and the environment. Hence the German peace building concept focuses on the traditional development category of socio-economic assistance (including return of refugees and IDPs) and support for the political framework, which is a well-established part of assistance to countries in transition. The broad categories of security and reconciliation receive less emphasis.⁴¹

Although Berlin wants to eliminate the structural causes of conflicts, a detailed description of conflict-causes is still nowhere to be found. Insufficiently the plan states, "armed conflicts are

amt.de/www/en/aussenpolitik/friedenspolitik/ziv_km/konfliktpraev_html. (access 01/11/2005). The Comprehensive Concept points out, that poverty alleviation is key for laying the foundations for avoiding violent conflict.

³⁸ See http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/de/infoservice/download/pdf/dokumente/afrika_strategie.pdf.

³⁹ See Foreign office home-page entry 'Crisis prevention and management as German foreign policy objectives' (April 2002); http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/aussenpolitik/friedenspolitik/ziv_km/konfliktpraev-1_html (access 01/11/2005).

⁴⁰ http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/de/infoservice/download/pdf/friedenspolitik/g8/konfliktbewaeltigung_afrika_2003.pdf (access 01/11/2005).

⁴¹ Compared to other international actors, Germany stands out for doing rather little in the security dimension.

both the result and the cause of serious political, social, economic and environmental mismanagement.”⁴²

The afore mentioned ‘Utstein Study’ points out, that there exists no common understanding and interpretations/perceptions of peace building as a method, concept or approach among the German actors of development cooperation. In the German context there are no common criteria to distinguish between peace building activities and measures that address conflict directly, and those that address conflict indirectly (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Norway] 2004). The national Utstein report by the GTZ identifies both conceptual confusion and a very variable degree of strategic consistency and thinking in project planning and country portfolios (GTZ 2003: 19-21, 25). Due to these deficiencies, one essential element is the objective to increase the coherence of crisis prevention measures within the Federal Government. The Government has set up an ‘Interministerial Steering Group for Civilian Crisis Prevention’ (September 2004) in order to anchor crisis prevention as a cross-sectoral task in the overall policy of the Federal Government.⁴³

In sum, evidence of growing professionalism in the handling of peace and conflict issues since the mid-1990s, with a further strengthening since 2000, can be detected. New fields of action and also new instruments were established. But while many strategies and experiences are already available for post-conflict reconstruction, there is still a disturbing lack of know-how and experience available for true crisis prevention. At present, many project planning documents frequently make only passing reference to conflict as an issue. The process of adapting country portfolios to reflect new priorities after the comprehensive concept was laid out is not yet completed.

Taken all together the picture of the various conceptual starting points of conflict prevention policies by major bilateral and multilateral donors is bewildering. More general policies (poverty reduction!) and already existing tools might influence the analysis of conflict, which is hardly intellectually acceptable.

What the long list of potential conflict causes suggests, is that:

1. There is no consensus on conflict causes between bilateral donors and influential multinational organisations;
2. There is not necessarily even a consensus between different ministries or departments of the same government/organisation;

⁴² Die Bundesregierung (2004) 7 (English Version).

⁴³ Taking the British Global Conflict Prevention Pool and the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool as role models, the German Government wants to adopt this British model and to verify, if a pilot scheme can be implemented (Müller 2005: 9).

3. There is much confusion in the use of conflict types and indicators and therefore doubts are permitted as to the effectiveness or existence of an overall analytical framework;
4. The specification of conflict causes evolves over time– there is obviously a need to adapt policy to new insights. However, it is never clear if a new set of ‘official’ conflict causes is the result of analytical progress. Changes in policies are not even commented.
5. The conflict causes singled out in some instances fit the policy of single actors; with the World Bank putting forward socio-economic factors and waving a strong pro-government bias (its partners are predominantly African governments). The British concern with collapsing states and lack of mechanisms for conflict management is in line with a pronounced readiness to intervene even militarily (Sierra Leone); etc. However, the analysis is not always in line with the responses offered.

What is striking is the multiple and prominent reference to poverty as a cause of (or poverty reduction as a solution to) African conflicts; this seems to be the smallest common denominator for many actors involved in African affairs. African voices heard in this context stress this point as well.⁴⁴ However, poverty reduction as a core paradigm in donor relations towards Africa clearly needs a more political focus to become a conflict preventive policy. According to the author of a recent study, a closer look at the relationship between both objectives is necessary

“Current policy thinking (...) tends to be underpinned by the assumption that ‘poverty’ and ‘social exclusion’ cause conflict. Poverty eradication is then justified as a form of conflict prevention. The relationship, however, is more complex and hence needs refinement. Conflict is as much a consequence of development as it is a constraint on development” (Verstegen 2001: 5).

This quotation should warn against simplistic approaches. The tendency to pick segments of conflict causes might be explained best by the preponderance of narrow departmental interests. Contradictions of sectoral donor policies can easily be found. The absence of a comprehensive view on conflict and peace including the acknowledgement of the inter-relatedness of conflict dynamics with own activities leads the international community into a situation where conflict preventive effects take place only at random. While the debate in humanitarian assistance (Anderson 1999) has achieved a certain standard, e.g. automatically taking negative effects of own actions into account, this did not happen yet for the bulk of devel-

⁴⁴ The New Partnership for Africa’s Development initiative (NEPAD; October 2001) by African Leaders also offers a strange understanding of conflict: According to the document that contains a ‘Peace and Security Initiative’ African states are just ‘vulnerable’ to conflict, conflict causes are nowhere explicitly stated (para 73).

opmental action, where unintended consequences are still rarely under scrutiny let alone conceptually incorporated in project designs.

5. Conclusions and Perspectives

Resuming chapter 2, 3 and 4, we can assert that practice and academia are faced with four major forms of misinterpretations of violent conflicts in Africa – potentially leading to erroneous policies:

1. Oversimplification (frequently: poverty as prime cause of conflict)
2. Lack of focus (unsystematic addition of conflict causes)
3. Lack of conceptual clarity (no distinction between different types of conflict factors)
4. State-centrism (Lack of concern for transnational phenomena, and non-state actors).⁴⁵

Additionally, the lack of a vision of what would be the prerequisites for a peaceful society is becoming clearer every day.⁴⁶ However, an outspoken critic of the new agenda between conflict prevention and resolution warns that ‘liberal peace’ as he calls the concept would reflect ‘a radical developmental agenda of social transformation’ (Duffield 2001: 11). There is indeed a heavy dose of presumptuousness when westerners draw up ideal societies for Africans. In fact, policy-makers and academics from North and South need to discuss more openly what they are aiming at. In the absence of that discussion actors should have at least some guiding principles for understanding the challenges they are facing.

Is there something like a well-suited, maybe even Africa-specific analytical framework? A first response might be that it would be hazardous to simplify a complex picture, ‘Africa’ might not offer an appropriate level of generalisation. Anyhow, broader approaches integrating structural conflict factors including state failure, flawed democratisation, inefficient institutions, politics of identity, competition for scarce or precious resources as well as the trau-

⁴⁵ Reno (2001: 198) challenges ‘the international expectation that all Africans live within political units that at least resemble states’. A sharp critique on Reno, Chabal and Daloz (1999), and others is offered by Joseph (2002).

⁴⁶ The academic literature on causes of conflict frequently names the absence of democracy as a main factor for uncivil societies – and rightly so. However, the linkage is more complicated. Although democracy might make violence unnecessary it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for domestic peace. Stable autocratic regimes might be more capable in preventing violent internal conflicts than unstable democracies, especially in least developed countries after conflict. Being more liberal than dictatorships, democratic societies encourage dissent but might not be responsive enough to concede substantive demands. Therefore social groups resort to unconstitutional channels and violent means to show their discontent. Political change can compound the problem further. Specifically the process of democratisation rarely occurs smoothly and in linear fashion. The effectiveness in preventing violent means may not be given by these (fragile) new democracies with regard to weakness in the specific institutional design (see Burnell 2004).

matic experiences and structural consequences of colonial rule and war offer a better analytical framework than one-dimensional explanations.⁴⁷

Since both spheres are more (practitioners) or less (researchers) infected by the above-mentioned common misinterpretations of conflict, it could be useful to find a common way out of it. Here, the policy-sphere has to offer a valid formula, that still needs to be refined, tested and specified for different arenas and policies: the leitmotif of 'structural stability' which has been adopted in 1997 by the OECD DAC, but has unfortunately remained a 'second-rank' concept. The definition given by the EU is broad enough to cover most of the concerns developed above:

"Structural stability is to be understood as a term denoting a dynamic situation, a situation of stability able to cope with the dynamics inherent in (emerging) democratic societies. Structural stability could thus be defined as a situation involving sustainable economic development, democracy and respect for human rights, viable political structures, and healthy social and environmental conditions, with the capacity to manage change without to resort to violent conflict." (European Commission 1996).

When carefully developed, the argument contained in this definition and the slightly different one offered by the OECD DAC leads to an understanding of structural stability as a 'peace order' with seven building blocks (Mehler 2002b):

- Economy: sustainable economic growth
- Ecology: environmental security
- Society: social justice
- Politics 1: viable political (and administrative) structures
- Politics 2: democracy (including transfer of power by elections)
- Politics 3: rule of law and human rights
- Politics 4: inclusion of major identity and elite groups.

One core assumption is that all these elements are explicitly inter-linked and mutually reinforcing. The reverse picture of 'structural instability' can be easily derived from that list (social injustice, absence of democracy, exclusion, etc.). Here as well, the 'building blocks' are inter-linked and together form a 'conflict order' – they might represent a set of appropriate 'root causes' of conflict. Other conflict factor-types (aggravating factors, prolonging factors, triggers) could then be easily derived. To draw on structural stability for the development of an appropriate analytical framework for African conflicts has one additional advantage: the term itself exists for some years (even longer in natural sciences!) and it has received acceptance in the framework of the OECD DAC.

⁴⁷ Deng 1996; a systematic view is presented by Engel and Mehler 2000.

What is even more relevant is the possibility to escape apodictic judgements about the viability of states and societies of the whole continent. The drawing up of 'profiles' of structural stability/instability would reveal that there are distinct and variable shortcomings or potentials in different building-blocks of structural stability for varying African states or societies.

One major shortcoming of this approach is its focus on structure. It needs to be complemented by an analysis of actors and behaviour. Focusing on agency and thereby taking into account the strategies, motives and behaviour of local stakeholders should not be portrayed as an alternative to structural approaches, but rather as a complementary (second) step in analysis.⁴⁸

One of the major flaws in the way conflict prevention is put into practice currently is to remain very state-focused, while we know that conflicts develop frequently locally and then easily cross existing borders becoming an issue for sub-regional organisations. Conflicts are not confined to the territory of a (increasingly fictitious) nation-state, a growing 'transnationalism' is associated with contemporary violent conflict (Engel/Mehler 2005). The weakness of state structures is an established feature very familiar to African citizens in a sizeable proportion of the continent. The discussion on the use of cooperation with 'rotten' or underperforming state structures has been engaged in development cooperation for some time now, it is unavoidable in respect to crisis prevention: On the one hand the state (or the judiciary system or the security apparatus) failed to function in resolving/managing conflicts in several cases, but on the other hand development cooperation risks to contribute to its further degradation, if it is only cooperating with some traditional leaders or the civil society (Debiel et al. 2005). But it is clear that problems and solutions can be found on two other levels than the nation-state: on the local and the border-transcending sub-regional level.

This might best be exemplified by focusing on the security sector: In West Africa's major war zone spreading now from Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia to Côte d'Ivoire conflict has its local roots, but its trans-border dynamics. There are local 'violence actors' ranging from traditional hunters to armed students movements as well as international 'violence actors' ranging from ECOWAS peace-keepers to armed refugees hired by the parties in conflict. They might be as important as the state actors but receive little analytical attention. An answer to this challenge may reside in the building of a 'sub-regional security architecture' which would necessitate a conscious networking between public, private and local security forces.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Some valuable work has recently been offered from this perspective – again mainly on material motivations (e.g. Jean/Rufin 1996; Herbst 2000, Berdal/Malone 2000). There might be a need to map violence actors as well according to their protective capacities in the sense of emerging oligopolies of violence (Mehler 2004).

⁴⁹ Shearing and Kempa 2000. Some more ideas explaining why such an approach has its merits can be found in de Waal (2002).

The delimitation of responsibilities between those forces is crucial. In their current form of co-existence, vigilantes and other violent actors are probably inimical to democracy and therefore structural stability (Baker 2002). Of course there will be conflicts of competence between central and local actors, but this is exactly why the issue must be addressed in a conscious manner. Recognition of those non-public actors could be a formal and explicit one, following clear criteria and including the obligation to respect human rights, a kind of certification rather than a gratification scheme.

The argumentation of this paper offers a divergent reading and deducts lessons for a more realistic conflict prevention policy towards Africa. The holistic view on a society's capacity of living in peace with itself and its neighbours – inherent in the notion of structural stability – offers a framework for analysis and action as well as a basis of discussion between donors and recipients of development aid (Lock 2002). A parallel enlargement of the focus of attention from the national towards the local and the sub-regional level is the appropriate answer to the declining, while still existing importance of the nation-state in war-torn parts of Africa. The identification of escalation patterns and a clear conceptual distinction between conflict sustaining/prolonging factors and 'root causes' of conflict are important for correct analyses (academics) and efficient strategies (practitioners). Finally, there is a wide gap in the understanding of conflict causes between different actors involved in conflict prevention policies that should be overcome by frank exchanges of viewpoints.

There is every reason to believe that an increasing number of African countries will face violent conflict in the decades to come. Therefore, it would be helpful if more African policy-makers, aid bureaucracies and researchers would be familiar with appropriate approaches of conflict analysis and with adequate designs of a stable peace order.

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