

CONFLICTS AND PROSPECTS FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

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There is substantial evidence that the resolution of conflicts in Africa is a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable economic development and growth. Countries that were previously torn by conflicts such as Angola, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia have moved decisively from economic stagnation and decline to steady economic growth. But Africa remains home to a number of significant conflicts. These conflicts impart considerable costs to the countries concerned but also to their neighbors. Furthermore, there are many fragile states, and the possibility of new conflicts is real.

The causes of conflicts in Africa include ethnic distrust, religious discrimination and intolerance, corruption, injustice and poor governance. In some cases, the internal divisions may be fuelled by external forces seeking, for example, to exploit natural resources. In other cases, external powers might intervene in the politics of the African countries where they wish to influence the governments con-

sidered to be geo-politically strategic or sensitive to their own interests.

Many nations of Africa are somewhere in the middle between extreme violence, as in the case of Somalia, and virtual domestic peace, such as Tanzania or Botswana. There are some countries, which though not totally violent, are nevertheless experiencing considerable stress and tension. For example, countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have United Nations peacekeeping forces stationed in their countries to help resolve internal conflicts. The island of Madagascar probably fits into this category as well. Economic growth in these countries is considerably muted and citizens are exposed to fear and violence. Yet, in other African countries, a high degree of stability has been established, but some bursts of violence reveal that considerable underlying tensions remain unresolved. Examples of these are the various outbreaks of violence in Nigeria in the Northern Region and in Plateau and Delta States, the Lord's

Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency in Uganda, the post-election violence in Kenya in 2007, and the political cleavages in Zimbabwe. Despite strong efforts in these countries to resolve the underlying conflicts, there is still considerable unease and uncertainty about peace and political stability there.

The ultimate resolution of conflicts in Africa requires political leadership that skillfully adopts formulas that suit the peculiar conditions of these African states. For example, the adoption of “broad-based” political parties that attempt to include all tribes and religions have helped Uganda to enjoy relative stability and growth in the last 25 years compared to previous years. Similarly, the experiment in Burundi in which every ethnic group is guaranteed a specified proportion of representation in the executive and parliament appears to be promising, following a long period of very fierce and bloody conflicts. Similar “inclusion” models were indispensable to the political settlements, however tenuous, that followed electoral impasses in Zimbabwe and Kenya.

As we faced the debacle of political conflict and gridlock in Côte d’Ivoire at the end of 2010, and now anticipate presidential elections in a host of African countries in 2011, fear and uncertainty will be acutely felt both within Africa and the world community. Africa will need creative leadership that sees beyond “winner takes all” and instead designs accommodative arrangements to include representations of all tribes and religions.

African conflicts may not be solved by focusing on the correctness of electoral procedures alone. It may be even more critical to ensure that the design of the constitution assures an acceptable representation of all groups in all the structures of government. The

resolution of conflicts and the establishment of a harmonious coexistence among Africans require, as elsewhere, the irrevocable and certain assurance of economic and political justice for all.

2011 presents immense opportunities for Africa to achieve high rates of economic growth; however, these opportunities can only materialize if peace is maintained. Given the recent record, there is a high likelihood of the emergence of new conflicts and escalation of existing ones. Such unfortunate outcomes could greatly undermine growth in 2011.