

Ending Communal Conflicts in Africa: The Relevance of Traditional Approaches to Conflict Resolution

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Abstract : The failure of international responses to armed conflict to address local preconditions for national stability has recently attracted what has been called the 'local turn' in peace building. This 'local turn' in peace building amplified a renewed interest in traditional/indigenous methods of conflict resolution, a field that has been hitherto dominated by anthropologists with their focus on the procedures and rituals of such approaches. This notwithstanding, there is still limited empirical work on the relevance of traditional methods of conflict resolution to end localized conflicts vis-à-vis hybrid and modern approaches. The few exceptions to this generally draw their conclusion from very few (almost all successful) cases that make it difficult to judge the validity and cross-case application of their results. This paper seeks to fill these gaps by undertaking a quantitative analysis of the trend and applications of different communal conflict resolution initiatives, their potential to usher in long-term peace, and the extent to which their outcomes are influenced by the intensity and scope of a conflict. The paper makes the following three tentative conclusions. First, traditional mechanisms and traditional actors still dominate the communal conflict resolution landscape, either individually or in combination with other methods. Second, traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution tend to be more successful in ending a conflict and preventing its re-occurrence compared to hybrid and modern arrangements. This notwithstanding and probably due to the scholarly call for local turn in peace building, contemporary communal conflict resolution approaches are becoming less and less reliant on traditional mechanisms alone and (therefore) less effective. Third, there is yet inconclusive evidence on whether hybridization is an asset or a liability in the resolution of communal conflicts and the extent to which this might be mediated by the intensity of a conflict.

Keywords : traditional conflict resolution, hybrid conflict resolution, communal conflict, relevance, conflict intensity

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