

The 14th Annual Africa/Diaspora Conference (April 28th-30th, 2005) invited academics and development practitioners to consider “Contemporary/Critical Issues in African Development.” Given such a broad canvas, those academics and practitioners chose to address, define and analyze the conference theme through three distinct frames: conflict resolution, democracy and development; power, status and women in contemporary Africa; and education in Africa.

Several papers addressed various aspects of conflict resolution, democratization and development. These issues resonated throughout the panel marking the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. Three papers from that panel were especially representative of those themes. In “Constitutionalism as Framework for Post-Conflict Society Reconstruction in Rwanda,” Kelechi Kalu offered a unique analysis of both the origins of the genocide and how to promote conflict management and prevention in its aftermath. Rightfully eschewing conventional interpretations, such as state failure and ethnic hatred, Kalu suggests the origins of the genocide lie in the “[f]ailure to use the instruments of governance for the good of all Rwandans, and the outright manipulation of state institutions for the interest of a few.” According to Kalu, since the genocide originated in a crisis of governance, stability in post genocide Rwanda depends on the ability of the current Government of Rwanda to establish politics as an institution for civil resolution of differences. Specifically, President Kagame must use a framework of constitutionalism and governance processes that transparently establish security; an accessible system of justice; socioeconomic policies that meet the basic needs of citizens; and a governance system that actively invites every Rwandan to live up to their civic and social responsibilities to the state.

Whereas Kalu emphasized constitutionalism and governance processes as the key to understanding the destruction and reconstruction of contemporary Rwanda, Kiki Edozie, in her paper, “Deliberating Deep divisions, Conflict, and Prospects for Democracy in Africa’s Great Lakes,” identified the relationship between ethnicity and democracy as the catalyst for genocide and ethnic cleansing in Rwanda and Burundi, respectively. For each country, Edozie skillfully demonstrated how democracy fostered ethnically exclusionary and deeply divided societies during pivotal junctures (1960s and 1990s) of political development. While each country continues to embrace a particular type of nominally democratic regime—consociational in Burundi and majoritarian in Rwanda—both suffer from the inability to foster mutual learning among diverse groups. Using a constructivist model of radical pluralist democratic politics, she recommended that “both countries...view the current democratic mechanisms, institutions and ideas as mere nascent building blocs through which to insert ethnic grievances that have emerged from deep-divisions into a democratic context which is open to continuous challenge, negotiation and renewal through dialogue and deliberation.” Interestingly, from this perspective the way to address the democratic legitimacy crises in these countries is thus more democracy, “a type of democracy,” in the words of Arletta Norval, “that examines ethnicity from the perspective of a moral debate about a culturally contested political community, about cultural rights and obligations and about ethnic citizenship.”

The third paper on Rwanda, “Elusive Quest? The Political Economy of Reconciliation in Post Genocide Rwanda,” Patrick Cannon explained how a deep socioeconomic cleavage created a precondition for the political manipulation of and mass mobilization around ethnicity and then considers whether the current government has acknowledged and attempted to reduce that cleavage. Basically, he argued that after its first decade in power, the Rwanda Patriotic Front has used its skill and resourcefulness to commence a relatively promising economic reconstruction of the country, but it has yet to tailor those policies to local conditions so that they reduce the longstanding socioeconomic cleavage and include institutions that acknowledge and alleviate the marginalization of the majority of rural dwellers. “In short,” he concluded, “solutions in the economic sphere have not occurred in tandem with reconciliation, making the latter a protracted and tenuous process at best and an elusive quest at worst.”

In addition to conflict resolution, democratization and development in contemporary Rwanda, two other papers examined development from the perspectives of farmer participation in authorities of coffee exporting countries and cassava production in Imo State, Nigeria. Challenging entrenched, conventional wisdom that characterizes farmers in developing countries as powerless and devoid of political agency, Cari An Coe in a thirty country study, including fourteen African countries, titled “The Influence of Private Sector Participation in Market Regulatory Institutions of Developing Nations: Farmer Participation in Authorities of Coffee Exporting Countries,” persuasively demonstrates otherwise, at least in terms of farmers’ groups in coffee exporting countries. Specifically, she successfully argues that, as a result of market reforms, farmers’ groups exporting Arabica coffee have learned to penetrate state coffee authorities, form “social partnership(s)” to lower the farm-to export price gap, and thereby increase farm prices. Using corporatist networks to participate in the national coffee authority and diffuse benefits to individuals at the local level, farmers’ groups that participate in the authority are able to deliver access to inputs, credit and licensing privileges to their members. In the case of Arabica coffees, farmer participation in the regulatory authority has contributed to farm prices that are fifteen to twenty cents higher per pound in cases where Arabica farmers do not participate in the authority; though the same does not hold for robusta producers. Shifting from coffee to cassava, C.O. Asinobi, B. Ndimantang, and C.U. Nwajiuba, in “Cassava Production, Processing Trends and Constraints in Ohaji-Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria,” examined the constraints to increased cassava production for small scale farmers in a village in Imo State, Nigeria. Among the several constraints, the high cost of hired labor, low market price, and insufficient access to technology figured prominently. To overcome such constraints, the authors recommended pricing reforms and increased funding for technology and training, especially among women in the area.

Collectively, five papers addressed the issue of “Power, Status and Women in Contemporary Africa.” “Extending the Frontiers of the Age-long Powers of Women in Southeast Nigeria for Grassroots Development,” by Elizabeth Ugonma Anyakoha, assessed the power, limitations and potential of the Igbo *umuada*, or daughters of the lineage in Southeast Nigeria, based on questionnaire responses and interviews with 275 women. Among the power wielded by the *umuada*, funeral widowhood rites, traditional

marriage and conflict resolution among the kindred ranked highest. Given such powers, Anyakoha reasons, the *umuada* could become a force for positive change, promoting economic development, leading public health campaigns and registering voters. However, that potential has been circumscribed, due to several factors, including poverty, illiteracy, contentment with the status quo and political violence. Anyakoha suggests that increased education and rural poverty alleviation are reforms necessary for the *umuada* to attain that as yet unrealized potential.

In Kenya, where over half of the population lives in poverty, the average poor person is female, engaged in agriculture and lives in the country. In “Feminization of Poverty and Women in Development in Africa: The Case of Kenya,” Sophie Wanjiku Khasacha explains why. For the most part, rural female agricultural workers are poor because of the lack of land tenure rights, education and access to credit and capital. To remedy this situation, the author suggests the commonly cited antidotes such as education and access to credit, but also the development of political will among national governments, NGOs and business leaders to put in place “a policy framework and institutional mechanisms that equitable address the interests of women in all spheres of their lives.” As stated in the title of her paper, “Improving Women’s Rights through Education and Development,” Marine Stewart provides an informative summary of innovative programs, groups and individuals dedicated to empowering African women through education and development, ranging from the U.S. financed African Education Initiative to Uganda’s Grameen Technology Center and its Village Phone Program to the work of Wangari Maathai and Margaret Dongo.

While acknowledging the serious obstacles to reconstruction and reconciliation in Rwanda, Theodora Ayot, in “The Nature of Reconstruction and Reconciliation Programs in Rwanda: The Place of Women,” summarizes the important political, economic and social roles played by women in the rebuilding of that country since 1994. Finally, in “Rape in Matrimony: Entrench Global Disaster and Underdevelopment of Women: Nigeria in Focus,” Carol Arinze-Umobi and Ogugua Ikpeze consider whether the Nigerian law that maintains that a husband can not rape his wife is antiquated jurisprudence. Answering in the affirmative, the barristers argue that state law in the American states of Oregon, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Delaware and the United Nation’s Elimination of Violence and Discrimination against Women that protect wives against such violence should supersede Nigerian law. The Nigerian government, the authors assert, must revise its discriminatory laws regarding rape.

Another frame consisted of seven manuscripts on different aspects of education in Africa – from formal secondary and tertiary education to non-formal adult and health education. Papers from Ghana focused on providing accessible education. Emmanuel Kwame Ocloo proposed making secondary education accessible to children living in poverty by introducing microfinance practices to supplement public spending on education. The proposed microfinancing practice is apparently similar to the informal Susu system that is common among rural households. Warren Hope shared a strategy to alleviate the academic brain drain phenomenon in higher education in Ghana. The partnership formed between Florida A&M University and the University of Cape Coast provides accessible

doctorate degrees to Ghanaians without the need for them to leave their homeland that in turn helps Ghana retain their academicians.

Papers on education in Nigeria included both formal and non-formal education systems. Chika Peace Enueme and Elo Charity Oju studied the effectiveness of the Child-friendly School Initiative introduced in primary schools since 2000. Students' academic performance in child-friendly schools was found to be significantly better than in non-child friendly schools. Child-friendly schools provide a conducive learning environment that respects the rights of children regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, physical/mental ability and family status, is community based and meet the health and safety needs of the children among other things.

Schools recognize that both academic and behavioral performance is vital in the development of their students. The increasing disciplinary problems among youth in secondary schools have apparently reached levels of concern. The extent of the youth's disciplinary problems has been thought to be directly correlated to the principals' disciplinary skills. To help prove this hypothesis, Obidike Ngozi Diwunma developed the Disciplinary Management Skill Assessment Scale that measures the disciplinary skills of secondary school principals in Nigeria. The 25 item scale was tested high for reliability and validity.

Non-formal education in Nigeria as addressed by Ugomma Ebirim illustrates the effectiveness of non-formal adult education for rural women that focused on developing basic literacy and mathematic skills. It is argued that by increasing women's language and math skills that could be readily applied, women will be empowered to escape their poverty stricken, marginalized and oppressed lives.

The role of education in the war against the HIV/AIDS pandemic was illustrated by Abimbola Cole. The effectiveness of a radio serial drama, Makgabaneng, in providing HIV/AIDS preventive education through character modeling to their listeners was assessed. This radio serial in Botswana that aims at transforming the perception of HIV/AIDS is in its fifth year and has received positive reviews.

In the final papers on education, Patrick Cannon shared his immersion experience in post genocide Rwanda, and how it influenced his role as an academician and scholar, while Catherine Kroll used literary theory to interpret a recent trip to South Africa. Both illustrated the impact of experiential learning – certainly worth further thought.

Though not coalescing around a definable frame, three other papers deserve mentioning. In "The New Legal Order for Africa," Rigobert Butandu suggested that strengthened judiciaries—working in conjunction with various local, national, regional and international actors—are an overlooked but essential response needed to reverse the trend of state destabilization in Africa. Alassane Fall's "United States and France's Relationship towards West African Countries," contended that, due to relations with the IMF and World Bank, globalization and France's declining regional influence, Senegal's foreign policies are shifting from France to the U.S.. Finally, in "U.S. Aid as Facilitator

in Africa's Peace Negotiations," Rothchild and Emmanuel considered whether foreign aid during and after peace negotiations provided an incentive for peace. Examining five African countries prior to and during 2001-02, the authors concluded that long-term assistance may help create conditions for peace (South Africa and Zimbabwe), but short-term aid most likely will not (Rwanda, Liberia, and DR Congo).

While the frames used did not exhaust the subject, at the conclusion of the conference it was evident that conflict resolution and democratization, institutions, empowering women and educating the continent's population is as central to contemporary African development as economic growth.