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A change project to promote conflict resolution in order to ensure sustainable development in Africa

Abstract. The article describes the idea of a change project (a new course) in higher education. The aim of the change project is to promote traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and strategies in order to ensure sustainable development in Africa. The new program will combine the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and various conflict resolution scenarios by applying the technique of design thinking. The program will involve discussions about types of conflicts in Africa, the real causes of these conflicts, mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution (with special emphasis on the *rakiré* and the palaver tree) and design thinking. The author intends to implement the program at the Faculty of International Relations of the Ivan Franko National University in Lviv (Ukraine).

Keywords: conflict resolution, Africa, education, sustainable development, sustainable development goals, design thinking, change project

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1. Introduction

The African continent has long been the epicenter of many conflicts. Among the most common conflicts are:

- intra-family conflicts (*fadenkélé*), characterized by irreducible antagonisms between children of the same father;
- conflicts between individuals and villages (land disputes and those relating to clashes between shepherds and sedentary people over the grazing of animals on the latter's cultivated fields;

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- inheritance and matrimonial disputes, which are the most widespread in rural areas;
- political, social-economic conflicts experienced by all African urban centers.

These conflicts of political, economic, cultural, territorial and religious origin constitute a major obstacle to the successful development of the African continent. In addition to the endogenous causes, underlying those conflicts, it is possible to identify exogenous ones, one of which is the famous Berlin conference (late 1884-early 1885), which led to the balkanization of the continent. Africa is estimated to lose \$ 18 billion a year to armed violence, roughly the annual amount of development assistance for the entire continent. An African nation's economy typically declines by about 15% as a result of an armed conflict (as highlighted in Oxfam's 2007 report, "Africa's Missing Billions: International Arms Flows and cost of conflicts"). Violence and instability, and the resulting crime levels, discourage outward investment (*Why we need a global Arms Trade Treaty* n.d.).

The purpose of the university course described in this article is to promote African traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution and design thinking.

Some universities are increasingly confronted with the problem of inefficient or often outdated education. The author of this article believes that if Ukrainian students are given opportunities for their creative skills to flourish through design thinking, they will be more willing to assimilate traditional methods of conflict resolution in Africa. By the end of the module, students may be able to suggest new strategies for conflict resolution.

The proposed course will help students to apply new strategies drawn from African traditions and realities. As the father of the Burkinabè revolution¹ Captain Thomas Isidore SANKARA, once said in 1984, "to African problems, African remedies" (Sankara, 1987). It would therefore be inappropriate to keep believing that conflicts on the continent can be reduced with non-African-based solutions. The course will be held at Ivan Franko National University in Lviv for the benefit of Ukrainian and European students, but most of the materials to be used during the course come from African sources and traditions.²

¹ Captain Thomas Sankara, considered the father of the Burkina Faso revolution in August 1983, was president of Burkina Faso. At the head of a group of Burkinabè army officers, he seized power on August 4, 1983 in a coup. He changed the country's name from the Republic of Upper Volta to Burkina Faso (land of honest men). During three years of the revolution, he reorganized the Burkinabè administration under the banner of "fight against mismanagement, corruption and favoritism". He is regarded as the African Che Guevara because of his commitment to defend the cause of the weakest in Africa and everywhere in the whole world where needed. 33 years after his assassination, Thomas Sankara remains an icon who inspires Burkinabè and African youth. This is why he is the father of the Burkinabè revolution.

² For a long time, the former colonizing powers, such as France and Great Britain, believed that conflicts in Africa could be resolved only in offices in Paris, London or Brussels. On several occasions,

Emphasis should be placed on design thinking by associating it with traditional methods of conflict resolution (for example: the *rakiré* and the *palaver tree*). For example, when faced with a case of conflict between two villages, students will have to play a scenario game based on traditional methods in order to find new solutions.

As future diplomats and experts in international politics, students of International Relations will be able to develop skills based on systems thinking, futures thinking, values thinking, competence collaboration, critical thinking, personal competence, and integrated problem-definition competence.

Drawing on African realities including traditional kingdom³ our students will be able to develop various skills in order to propose new strategies and face different global challenges.

2. The status of African studies at the Ivan Franko National University

There are currently several programs at the Faculty of International Relations of the Ivan Franko National University. With respect to purely African studies, programs devoted to African issues are often treated superficially. In addition to being approached superficially, African studies are not treated with an adequate understanding of African realities. One likely reason for this situation is the history and geography of Ukraine, which is located in Eastern Europe and Africa, has played a marginal role in its foreign policy: currently Ukraine has only 10 embassies in Africa.⁴ In addition, since Ukraine's independence, no Ukrainian president has visited the continent and cultural exchanges are not very intense. Consequently, Ukrainian students show little interest in African issues. Also, it is difficult to find professors of conflictology or African studies who combine instruction in con-

Europe wanted to resolve certain African conflicts outside the African continent, as was the case with the Linas-Marcoussis agreement in relation to the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire in January 24, 2003. That agreement was a failure and failed to resolve the Ivorian crisis. However, it was the Ouagadougou political agreement in 2007 that led the various protagonists to compromise and accept a national unity government. That second agreement led to the elections and allowed the country to regain stability. This is why the course will be based on certain African realities.

³ A traditional kingdom is a political and administrative entity representing territorial communities living in a given region, subject to the domination of a chief whose authority no longer rests solely on kinship, but also on prestige and some limited coercion. In sub-Saharan Africa, traditional kingdoms were micro-states before colonization.

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. <https://mfa.gov.ua/diplomaticzni-ustanovi/inozemni-diplomaticzni-ustanovi-v-ukrayini>

flict resolution and sustainable development. This is why the proposed approach has received a preliminary favorable opinion from the authorities of the department of international relations.

2.1. The idea of a change project

The goal of my change project is to develop a student training program aiming at promoting traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in order to ensure harmonious sustainable development in Africa, allowing students to understand the reasons for the recurrence of conflicts on the continent, to associate the sustainable development goals with different conflict resolution scenarios. The new student training program will be called “Conflict Resolution and Sustainable Development in Africa”.

The objective of the change project is to promote peace, stability for sustainable development on the African continent.

The training program is intended for students of the Faculty of International Relations of the Ivan Franko National University in Lviv and other Ukrainian and European educational institutions.

The expected outcomes of the change project include:

- students will be able to suggest effective and lasting scenarios in order to reduce or even end conflicts in Africa,
- increased presence of the SDGs and sustainability in conflicts resolution,
- new appreciation of conflict situations in Africa.

Given that according to the United Nations Development Program the most pressing social and political issues in Africa require actions aimed at strengthening gender equality, empowering women and girls, etc., the project will mainly focus on the following SDGs:

- 1 – no poverty
- 2 – zero hunger
- 3 – good health and well-being
- 4 – quality education
- 5 – gender equality
- 6 – clean water and sanitation
- 9 – decent work and economic growth
- 10 – reduced inequalities
- 13 – climate action
- 15 – life on land
- 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions
- 17 – partnerships for the goals

2.2. Actions towards the change project

Several steps need to be taken in order to launch the new program.

Step 1. Present the project to the dean of the faculty of international relations. To date, we have been able to present the outline of the project to the dean who encouraged us to go through with our plans for the benefit of the faculty.

Step 2. Present the project to the vice-dean of the faculty. Due to his busy schedule, we have not been able to meet him yet.

Step 3. Work with my thesis supervisor, who has given his full support, being the mainstay of the faculty as regards African studies. He will spare no effort in implementing this new program.

Step 4. Submit the program draft to the head of the department of international relations and professor of Diplomacy. The professor finds the project fascinating and will bring his influence to support us.

Step 5. Benefit from the support and experience of the director of the northern Europe center at Ivan Franko National University in Lviv, who specializes in environmental protection and sustainable development. She has been receptive to all of our requests and encouraged us to implement the project. With all this support, we plan to implement the project in two years.

2.3. Methods of instruction to be used: design thinking

Design thinking will be used as a strategy of conflict prevention. To achieve the 12 development goals (no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, climate action, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions, partnerships for the goals) that I believe are priorities for the African continent, for example by means of stimulating role plays based on ‘Rakiré’ (the joking kinship) and the palaver tree (for example, with the class divided into two or three groups, where each group represents one clan and acts out the role of a cousin against another group. The scenario simulates a conflict situation and the groups gather under the palaver tree to find a solution). We believe that Africans must rely on their traditional mechanisms that guarantee stability, social cohesion and progress. Two of these traditional mechanisms include the ‘Rakiré’ (the joking kinship) and the palaver tree.

“‘Rakiré’ or joking kinship is a social practice typically found in West and Central Africa, which allows, and sometimes even requires, members of the same family (such as distant cousins), with certain surnames (in Senegal, in Burkina), of certain ethnic groups or inhabitants of a given region, territory and province

(which can then be described as a joking alliance) to make fun or to insult one another without consequences. These verbal confrontations are interpreted by anthropologists as a means of relaxation, social cohesion or reconciliation, or even as a sacred practice. The *rakiré* is a mode of mitigating or resolving inter-ethnic conflicts in West Africa and was a major component of human relations in ancient societies. In Burkina Faso, the practice remains alive, despite the transformation of cultural frameworks and the impact of imported values. A joking alliance is a cement that binds and federates cultures, languages, regions and even countries. The practice is in fact based on a form of supra language or supra culture allowing ethnic groups to find themselves on a common ground of understanding that allows the symbiosis of cultures. From then on, the notions of language and ethnicity are sublimated through the verbal game and the practice of the phenomenon to retain only the expression of shared common values such as solidarity, mutual understanding, and brotherhood. In short, the interbreeding of values, languages and cultures as a form of language transcending the simple notion of ethnicity and language” (Zongo, 2020, p. 18).

“Regarding our second conflict resolution solution and the 9 sustainable development goals mentioned above, we propose a ‘palaver tree.’ In fact, the palaver tree is where we are in Africa at night in the countryside to start ‘long and tumultuous discussions’ and to talk, organize a city or talk about a lot of things” (Zongo, 2020, p. 17).

“It is also this majestic tree, impressive scale, which gives a cool shade especially during the dry season: in general, the Shea, the ‘cailcédrat,’ the mango tree, etc. that is to say, the tree whose leaves are not deciduous. It gives shade in any season. The life of the village is governed by the palaver tree: marriages, land conflicts, good or bad behavior of a particular young man, this or that young girl, good or bad harvest, news from relatives of neighboring villages, protection of the village against witchcraft, and to protect the village against various plagues (drought, epidemics, etc.). The village is thus scrutinized from all angles. It is truly a collective management of the village. The cohesion of the village community is thus ensured, just as peace and understanding are ensured between inhabitants of the same village and then between neighboring villages” (Zongo, 2020, p. 18). Here jokes or derision are used between allies, very often with the intention of insulting and ridiculing, making it possible to relax relationships. The method gives one ally the opportunity to say bluntly to the other ally whatever they want. In the event of a conflict, the “joking brother” can use the pact that binds him to his brother in order to calm and pacify him. As the entities (village, kingdom) are mostly made up of people with the same surname, the “joke fraternity” can help to prevent or stem a conflict in traditional societies. Even in modern times, in the latest so-called Tuareg conflicts in northern Mali,

the political authorities did not hesitate to put it into practice to have the Tu-areg tribes and their brothers in Sonrai joke around the negotiation table and elsewhere.

3. Types of conflicts in Africa

“According to a report by APRM (African Peer Review Mechanism), there are several types of conflicts on the continent. The conflicts generally encountered on the continent stem from electoral violence and land issues, while the predominant causes or factors of conflict are ethnic / religious differences, inequalities and poverty” (Gluhbegovic, 2016, p. 1).

3.1. The real causes of these conflicts

“In fact, electoral competitions in Africa are regularly peppered with violence and protest, which can lead to confrontations between members of the same political party, or between the different political parties. The organization of elections is still not transparent. In order to stay in power, some leaders do not hesitate to resort to unorthodox practices. Such behavior can only lead to unrest in the country. In 2011, for example, there was a post-election crisis in Ivory Coast causing the death of nearly 3,000 people because President Laurent Gbagbo did not want to recognize the victory of his opponent Alassane Dramane Ouattara.

Moreover, one of the conditions present in several African countries and serving as a catalyst for political conflicts is the transition from a one-party system to a multi-party system or from an authoritarian regime to democratization. Tensions and lack of stability characterize these periods of change, which can lead to a power vacuum or challenges for the new power in place, compared to the old. In most countries that have begun the transition to a form of democracy, elections have become the battleground for the power and location of political conflict. [APRM]” (Gluhbegovic, 2016, p. 8).

As already mentioned, I agree with many other experts that the current issues of the African continent originated in the Berlin conference, held from November 1884 to February 1885, without the participation of African indigenous leaders.

Indeed, the new map of Africa drawn up following the Berlin conference is the origin of the border and social conflicts observed everywhere in Africa. This bad mapping is, for example, the cause of the Christmas War, fought in December 1985 between Mali’s Moussa Traoré and Burkina Faso’s Captain Thomas Sankara

over the Agacher Strip along the border of northern Burkina Faso. The resulting territorial division does not take into account the linguistic, ethnic, religious, geographical, political and historical realities that existed in Africa. Thus, entire families have been divided or separated between two or more countries. This is one of the reasons why family names, such as Ouattara, Coulibaly or Traoré can be found in several West African countries.

3.2. Mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of conflicts

“As many international experts believe that the current problems in Africa are largely the result of the Berlin Conference, we believe that the African people themselves must take the initiative to resolve conflicts on the continent. That’s what motivated Captain Thomas Sankara when he said, “we must accept to live as Africans. This is the only way to live free and dignified.” Without an adequate solution to the continent’s problems, I believe that it would be very difficult to achieve sustainable harmonious development” (Zongo, 2020, p. 18).

According to a World Bank data, 13 of the SDGs are a priority in two thirds of African countries. These objectives are: 8 – Decent work and economic growth; 2 – zero hunger; 3 – good health and well-being; 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions; 9 – industry, innovation and infrastructure; 6 – clean water and sanitation; 1 – no poverty; 4 – quality education; 7 – affordable and clean energy; 10 – reduction of inequalities 13 – climate action; 5 – gender equality; 11 – sustainable cities and communities (Gyimah-Boadi, 2019, Fig. 1).

4. The added value that the project will bring to universities

The department of international relations and diplomatic service of Ivan Franko University is among the best departments that train experts in international politics in Ukraine (*Top Universities in Ukraine. 2020 Ukrainian University Ranking*). But it is difficult to understand why questions concerning Africa are not approached with greater interest in this institution. Therefore, by implementing this project, I believe that the department of international relations will be strengthened and equipped with the tools and skills to tackle African issues with ease and mastery. Several studies show that Africa is a continent of the future, given to the young age of its population, the growth of its economy, the availability of natural resources. This project will therefore enable Ivan Franko University to develop students’ knowledge of conflicts in Africa and highlight the need of resolving

them in order to achieve sustainable development. This project will also make Ivan Franko University one of the first in Ukraine to have a subject that combines conflict resolution and sustainable development in Africa.

5. Conclusion

The main idea of the project is to promote sustainable development on the continent by first addressing the root causes of the ongoing conflicts. Conflicts on the African continent have various sources, including the famous Berlin conference. This conference triggered multiple border disputes between the new states. The resolution of certain conflicts requires taking into account several factors, including the cultural aspect. Although experts say “rakiré” and “palaver tree” strategies cannot always be invoked to resolve armed conflict, the importance of these practices as an effective means of conflict prevention must be taken into account.

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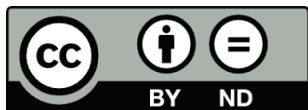
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Projekt pt. „Rozwiązywanie konfliktów w celu ustanowienia zrównoważonego rozwoju w Afryce”

Streszczenie. Artykuł opisuje projekt zmian w szkolnictwie wyższym, którego celem jest promowanie tradycyjnych mechanizmów rozwiązywania konfliktów i strategii zapewniających zrównoważony rozwój w Afryce. Proponowany program łączy w sobie cele zrównoważonego rozwoju (SDG) oraz różne scenariusze rozwiązywania konfliktów z wykorzystaniem techniki myślenia projektowego. Z tego względu w ramach nowego przedmiotu (konfliktologii) zastosowane będzie podejście zwane myśleniem projektowym, które pozwoli studentom tworzyć i proponować

nowe rozwiązania ograniczające konflikty w Afryce. Zastosowana metoda obejmuje dyskusje na temat rodzajów konfliktów w Afryce, ich rzeczywistych przyczyn oraz mechanizmów pokojowego rozwiązywania konfliktów, ze szczególnymi uwzględnieniem tradycyjnych metod afrykańskich: metody Rakiré i drzewa palaver. Program ma być realizowany na Lwowskim Uniwersytecie Narodowym im. Iwana Franko na Ukrainie.

Słowa kluczowe: rozwiązywanie konfliktów, Afryka, edukacja, zrównoważony rozwój, cele zrównoważonego rozwoju, myślenie projektowe, projekt zmiany



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