

Preventing renewed violence through peace building in the Bakassi peninsula (Cameroon)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines a conceptual framework of international conflict dynamics and resolution surrounding the Bakassi peninsula dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria and outlines intra-community tensions after its peaceful resolution through the International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict in 2002 and handing over of the Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon in 2008.

Although this peace initiative and pacific settlement has reduced armed conflict, it has unwittingly and paradoxically become a trigger factor for simmering tensions which threaten renewed violence as non-confrontational actors have now shifted conflict issues to primordialism (identity-based), resources (interest-based) and refusal to abide by the ICJ decision (values-based). The latest violence of 13th February 2015 in which pirates attacked a police boat at sea in the peninsula killing a Police Inspector and kidnapping a Police Commissioner is a core indicator that renewed armed violence cannot be ruled out in the peninsula.

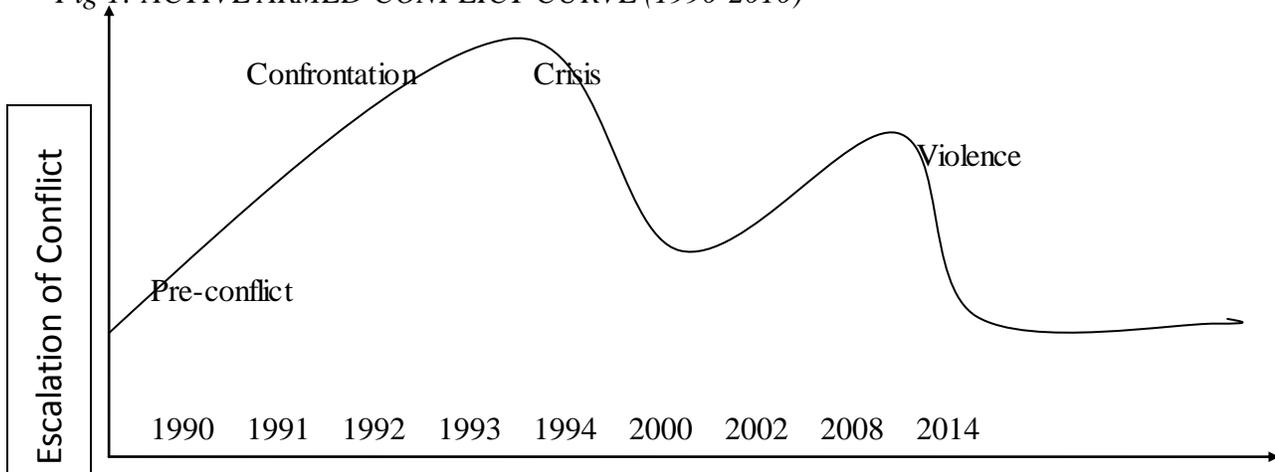
The aim of this paper therefore is to examine the post armed conflict issues underpinning these new tensions, the role of the various Actors involved, the diverse Positive and Negative Intervening Factors and to attempt outlining Policy options that would avert renewed violence..

I will be using the FAST Conflict Analysis Tool because of its comprehensive early warning methodology and Johan Gaultang's divider-connector strategy to illustrate the post armed conflict diagnosis.

BACKGROUND

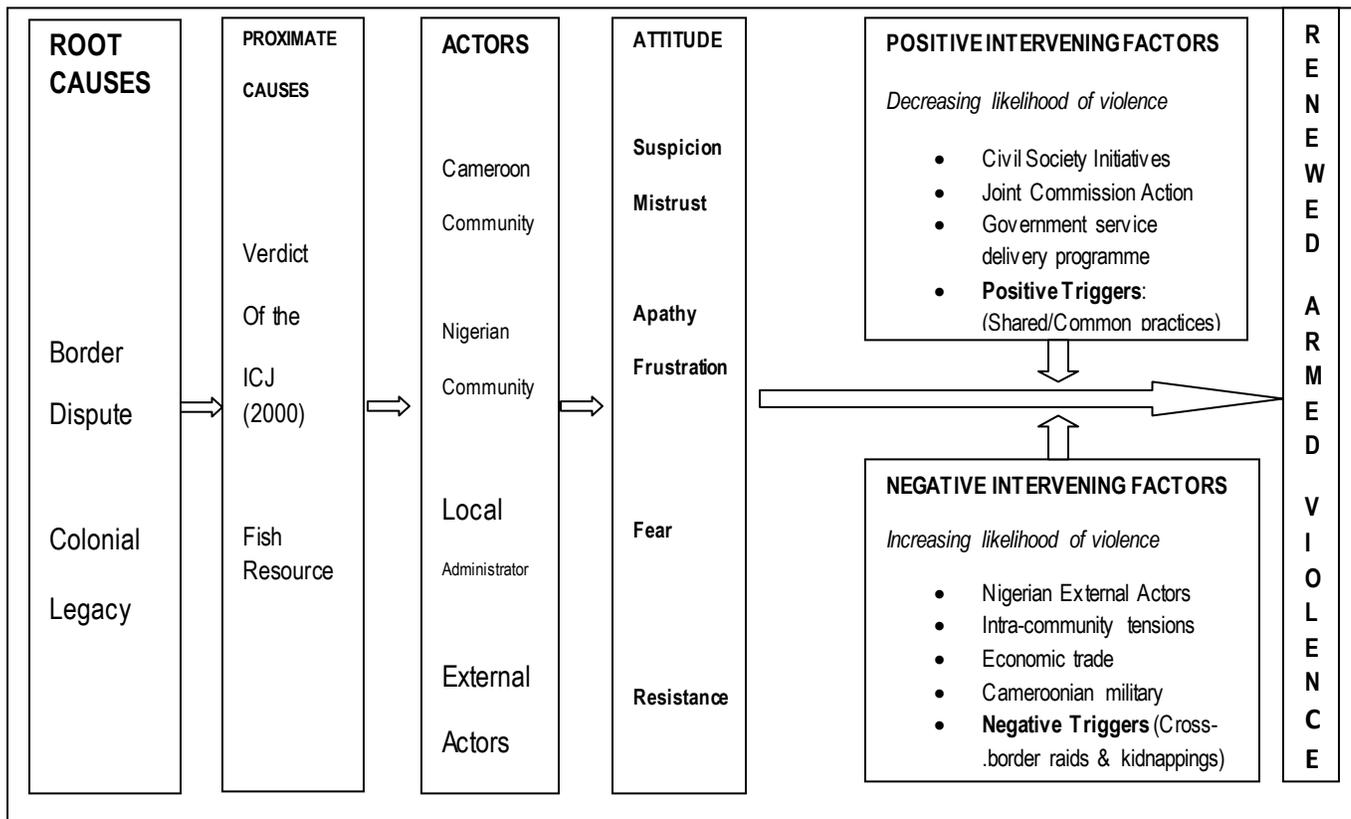
The Bakassi peninsula is a swampy resource – rich, 1600 kilometer – long border area between Cameroon and Nigeria extending from Chad to the Gulf of Guinea. It is found in Ndian division of the South West Region in Cameroon with a population of 150.000 – 300.000 inhabitants. According to official statistics, among the 300.000 people in the peninsula, only 2000 are Cameroonians while the rest are Nigerians.

Fig 1: ACTIVE ARMED CONFLICT CURVE (1990-2010)



As Figure 1 demonstrates, relative peace ensued until the early 90s when it became known that Bakassi peninsula harbours important deposits of oil/gas reserves. In 1993 the Nigerian troops occupied the Bakassi peninsula. In 1994 there were serious incidents of border incursions that provoked shooting and deaths on both the Nigerian and Cameroonian sides. In 1994 Cameroon submitted its entire border-related disputes with Nigeria to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for adjudication. After examining the case for eight years, the ICJ on 10th October 2002, delivered a judgment deciding in part, that the sovereignty over the Bakassi peninsula lies with Cameroon. On 12th June 2006, an Agreement called the “Green Tree Accord” was signed between Cameroon and Nigeria under the United Nations and on 14th August 2008 Bakassi was formally transferred to Cameroonian government. However sporadic attacks by unidentified gunmen and intra-community tensions between Cameroonians and Nigerians living in the peninsula have still been recorded as in September 2008. Indeed since 2008 pirates are said to have taken and released 50 hostages in separate instances. Before the most recent kidnapping of 13th February 2015, there was one on 11th February 2011 where pirates kidnapped the Divisional Officer and his entourage of 12 people. It is therefore evident as shall be shown below that tensions still exist in the post armed conflict.

Fig. 2 POST ARMED CONFLICT DIAGNOSIS (Backbone of FAST Analysis)



As shown in Figure.2, while the major root causes of the conflict are the border dispute and colonial legacy the main proximate causes are the ICJ verdict and Fish resources.

a) ICJ verdict

Immediately after the ICJ verdict was released, which of course has no enforcement mechanism, the Nigerian Senate submitted on 22nd November 2007 that the handover was contrary to Section 12 (1) of the 1999 Constitution and demanded a referendum. Even the UN body overseeing the negotiations-the Joint Cameroon and Nigeria Commission, indicated that technical problems delayed the transfer of the peninsula to Cameroon. This led the Nigerian community in Bakassi to dissociate themselves from the verdict arguing that they had not been consulted; they were not prepared to lose their Nigerian identity under the Cameroon government and expressed mistrust on the Cameroon military which often harass them over tax collection. In deed in June 2014 a dispute between a Nigerian businessman and Cameroonian tax collector forced local officials to impose a curfew throughout the locality. The behaviour of the Nigerian

community has been disaffection as seen in their reticence to pay taxes to the local Administration and reluctance to use the Cameroonian currency (CFA Francs) instead of the Nigerian currency (Naira). It must be mentioned that in January 2013 an option was given to the Nigerian community to stay in the peninsula and abide by the laws of Cameroon or return to Nigeria. Only a negligible 1% (2940 people) moved to a new makeshift settlement in Akpabuyo, Calabar, Nigeria. Yet those who opted to stay in Cameroon argue that they did so not because they wanted a Cameroonian identity but because they cannot part from their ancestral shrines and especially because of their historical interpretations which indicate that before the scramble for Africa, Bakassi was part of the ancient Kingdom of Calabar (Nigeria) and not on the Anglo-German Treaty of 11th March 1913 that formed the basis of the ICJ verdict. According to Francis Menjo Baje the Nigerian community is using this pre-colonial cultural reality to overshadow the pre-colonial cartographical fact.

Within the Cameroonian community which is in the minority, there is resentment, fear and suspicion against the Nigerian community. Resentment over the non-cooperative attitude of Nigerians in matters of fish trade, fear because of the high rate of raids and kidnappings by pirates from Nigeria and suspicion because Cameroonians believe the raids and kidnappings are carried out with the collusion of the Nigerian community in the peninsula.

b) Fish Conflict

According to figures provided by the Ministry of Economic Planning, the quantity of fish caught in 2013 rose to 833.995 kg of fresh fish and 318.702 kg of smoked fish that was marketed. However the Nigerian fishermen rather sell their fish in Nigeria than to Cameroonians because it is financially viable leading to skirmishes between the two communities. In 2014 there was an attempt by some members of the Cameroonian community to destroy the fishing equipment of a Nigerian family but the situation was put under control by the local Administration. Apart from these intra-community skirmishes, the established dominance of internal fishing multi-national companies (mostly Chinese) and their industrial harvesting has been attracting opposition from local fishermen. On the 13th November 2013 there was a confrontation on sea between some Nigerian fishermen and Chinese fishermen over the latter's use of fishing trawlers to

catch even fingerlings. Unfortunately this fish tensions have been subsumed under the general ICJ verdict contestations.

NEGATIVE INTERVENING FACTORS

While some of the negative intervening factors have already been mentioned in the preceding pages, it is important to underline here that these attitudes and behaviour resulting from proximate causes have fuelled the emergence of two major External Actors from Nigeria whose ideologies, actions and capacity to trigger and create fear and terror in the peninsula are early warning signals to increasing the likelihood of renewed violence in the peninsula. They are the Bakassi Movement for Self Determination sometimes known as the Bakassi Freedom Fighters and the Bakassi Liberation Movement.

The Bakassi Movement for Self Determination was founded in 2006 and they are fighting for the Independence of Bakassi and the creation of the Democratic Republic of Bakassi. In 2010, they set up a radio station on the fringes of the peninsula and hoisted a blue-white-red flag in the peninsula. They have vowed that Bakassi will find no peace under Cameroon's rule and claimed responsibility for the raids that occurred on October 16 2010 that took away the lives of nine soldiers and local fishermen and kidnapping on 11th February 2011.

The Bakassi Liberation Movement in a Press Release in May 2011 called on the Nigerian government to go to war again because it argues that there is no morality in International Relations adding that it is against the national interest of Nigeria in terms of security and economic interest to accept the ICJ verdict in its totality. The group believes that Nigeria's military might should be used for expansionist ambitions. Apart from these groups in Nigeria, high profile Nigerians, the Nigerian Bar Association and the Nigerian Press have been putting pressure on their Federal Government to appeal or ignore the ICJ verdict. For example an article titled "Why Nigeria should appeal ICJ verdict on Bakassi" published on 11th September 2012 in an internet discussion forum "Nairaland Forum" by a senior research fellow at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, NIIA, Lagos, Mallam Abdullahi U. Maiyaki argues that the Green Tree Agreement needed to be ratified by the Nigerian Parliament before it became effective as provided by the Vienna

Convention on law of Treaties. In a separate development The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) in an NBA Communiqué issued on Friday, August 30, 2012 after the Association's 52nd Annual General Conference held in Abuja asserted that there are fresh facts for the ICJ to revisit its judgment and thus requested the Federal Government of Nigeria to legitimately apply. The communiqué was endorsed by The World Igbo Congress (WIC) in the United States of America during their Congress of September 7 2012. On December 12 2014, the Nigerian Bakassi Returnees in Akpabuyo, Calabar described Bakassi as "their root and land of birth ransacked by an august visitor of doom" and blamed their "neither Cameroonian nor Nigerian identity plight" to the Green Tree Agreement. Within the Bakassi peninsula itself continuing harassment and acts of violence perpetrated by the Cameroonian gendarmes especially against the Nigerians as well complications and harassment of Nigerians caused by Identification process have raised concerns on a possible escalation of violence in the peninsula. According to Johan Galtung these negative intervening factors which he calls dividers are the structures that bring about conflict or escalate violence in a community. They can in some cases play the role of spoilers. Finally, Cameroon's new war against the terrorist group called Boko Haram in the North of Cameroon, legitimate as it is, risks diverting attention and resources from the alert signals in Bakassi thus making the peninsula more vulnerable.

POSITIVE INTERVENING FACTORS

There are diverse initiatives carried out in the peninsula that can mitigate renewed violence. These initiatives by Civil Society (Track II), Cameroon government, Joint Cameroon-Nigeria Commission and indigenous practices serve as connectors, positive trigger factors and peace building indicators that can limit the likelihood of renewed violence in the peninsula. According to Irene Santiago peace building is the process of increasing connectors and decreasing dividers so that development can occur. Working in the areas of education (encouraging girl education, teaching Cameroonian laws and citizenship education, creating mobile library spaces), capacity building (citizenship peace advocacy, traditional conflict mechanisms, peace committees) culture (organizing traditional dances, choral singing, canoe racing, football, fish festivals etc) gender-responsive training (gender budgeting in local councils, integrating gender policies etc) governance (paradigm shift from top-down to bottom-up decentralization in local

councils, open spaces for inclusive discussions and decision-making) and sustainable alternative livelihoods (mushroom farming, diversified agriculture) civil society initiatives have provided relative social cohesion in the community.

With regards to infrastructural development the government of Cameroon created a Coordination and Follow-up Committee for the implementation of Priority Projects in the Bakassi Peninsula on August 27, 2007. Some of the Priority projects have been carried out in the peninsula. These projects include the construction of classrooms, government offices, health centres, residences for workers, markets, speed-boats for administrative authorities, water supply, generators for energy supply, social centres, women's empowerment centres and support to farmers' organisations (Kendemeh 2010).

Among other projects earmarked worth CFAF 2.5 billion are the construction of camps for fishermen (and providing them with fishing gear), the construction of improved facilities for communal fish smoking, the extension of oil palm plantation and the construction of camps for workers, and the tarring of the Loum-Kumba-Ekondo-Titi-Mundemba-Isangele-Akwa road (Kendemeh 2010). Other projects include mobile telephone relay antennas, a CRTV (Cameroon Radio and Television) signal relay tower and a broadcast centre.

Work to demarcate the Cameroon –Nigeria border in Bakassi by the Joint Commission of Cameroon and Nigeria has been going on without hitches. In fact the Chairman of the Joint Commission Dr.Mohammed Ibn Chambas was in Cameroon on November 25th 2014 to supervise work done so far. He revealed that the Joint Commission has endorsed agreement so far on 1,893kilometres on a total length now estimated to be approximately 2,100kilometres, from the tripoint in the Lake Chad to the first point of the maritime boundary. He also declared that the independent expert hydrologist who was requested by both countries to examine the issues of the eastern channel of the Keraua River and of the main channel of the Mayo Tiel River had been contacted. Another meeting of the Transborder Security Committee was held in Yaounde on 19th February 2015 discussing areas of human trafficking and piracy.

Local groups like the Bakassi Women's Forum have been encouraging the use of shared indigenous practices such as shared and convertible currency, trade by barter (fish and

food crop swap) shared belief system, and mutual local language intelligibility between Cameroonian and Nigerian inhabitants as connectors for peace building.

All these positive intervening factors help in increasing human development capacity and increase peaceful coexistence in personal space and peace dividend in social space.

POLICY OPTIONS

Accompanying policy options by Cameroon, Nigeria and the international community, as well as other socio-economic and political developments emanating from the ICJ verdict “contestations” and fish curse are needed to consolidate the positive intervening factors if renewed armed violence is to be prevented.

- The government of Cameroon needs to carry out more important infrastructural developments in the health, education, environment, road, water and telecommunications domains in the Peninsula. This will ease the precarious living conditions of the Bakassi residents and act as incentives for other Cameroonians to accept working there.
- Border patrols by the two countries’ Police Forces should be established to check the activities of the External Nigerian Actors.
- Both governments should construct border markets with formal trading arrangements.
- Cameroon government should respect and implement Article 3 of the Green Tree Accord (guaranteeing the human rights of Nigerians living in the peninsula). It is good to know that a Tax Inspector was appointed in December 2014. This will limit the confrontation between the military and Nigerians over forceful tax recovery.
- Government should reinforce the implementation of the special financial incentive policy for Cameroonian civil servants working in the peninsula as well as other professional and vocational persons wishing to work there.
- Bakassi should be seen in a more global perspective with correlation to the insecurity covering all of the Gulf of Guinea.
- Civil society and local group initiatives at peace building should be supported financially as Track II approach by both governments and Development partners.

In this regard I must mention that the civil society organisation AFRICAphonic Cameroon has been playing a vital role in peace building in the peninsula. From November 2009 – December 2010 AFRICAphonic conducted training workshops captioned “**Promoting Citizens peace building capacity workshops and Town Hall meetings in Bakassi communities**” sponsored by United States Institute for Peace, America. The focus of this project was to provide the civil society with a complementary voice in peacemaking and peace building thereby promoting unofficial (Track II) dialogue on contentious issues. As in all societies, there exists a wealth of indigenous knowledge, norms, skills and practices which are relevant to establishing and maintaining peaceful relationships between individuals and groups and to deal with differences and disputes. The Bakassi peninsula is home to various civil society development agents (education, chiefs, church, business etc) whose indigenous knowledge and capacity on peace building needs to be honed. This led to the creation of local Peace committees and was accompanied by the monthly production of the “Bakassi Peace Letters”. The Peace letter carried views from the Bakassi people on their socio-economic problems and specific local areas of contention, opinion on strategies that the Bakassi inhabitants continue to employ in identifying sources of conflicts and unidentified assailants, news on the peace building and peacemaking mechanisms employed by the Bakassi Peace Coalition, news on confidence-building and collective security measures between the military and civilian on the one hand and the mixed ethnic groups on the other, and photographs on the reconstruction and development efforts (roads, health centres, water points etc) carried out by the Cameroonian government ,diplomatic services and private sector in Bakassi.

From November 2010 – December 2010 AFRICAphonic organized The **PEACE** project (**Peace Enhancement through Arts, Culture and Exercise project in Bakassi peninsula**) sponsored by Prince Claus Fund – Netherlands. The major aim of this project was to use sports as a unifying factor for confidence-building, mutual trust and inter cultural community dialogue. From November 2010 – February 2011 AFRICAphonic brought the five Mayors in the five local councils of Bakassi to a discussion with members of the local peace committees in order to draft a peace and development plan for their respective municipalities. The project dubbed **Enhancing peace building**

capacity project in Bakassi peninsula was funded by British High Commission in Cameroon.

CONCLUSION

It is important for government and other Development partners to recognize and lend support to the role civil society organisations play in peace building with areas like Education (girl education and mobile libraries), Agriculture (diversifying resource allocation through farming or mushroom planting in order to limit dependency on fish), Health (reinforcing polio immunization) Governance (inclusive, participatory governance taking account of gender mainstreaming) and Culture (building cultural industries as income generating activity).

These peace building mechanisms aimed at constructing peace in the minds of the people in tandem with government's efforts to provide basic social amenities to the people all focus at debunking Paul Collier's statement that there is a 44% chance that a post conflict scenario can relapse into violence within five years and a 50% chance within ten years.

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