

INSTITUTE ON PEACE AND JUSTICE STUDIES PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
WITHIN THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL TRADITION

ENTEBE, UGANDA, NOVEMBER 7-9, 2017

**The strengths of the Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations’
(HIPSIR’s) approach to peace and justice studies and particular obstacles or challenges
the Institute faces**

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Introduction

Although not in academic area, but in research and advocacy, there have been institutions in the continent that predate the HIPSIR. They have been dealing with socio-economic and political issues, continually adapting to contextual needs, researching and advocating for justice and rights. Among them are Jesuit centres such as the African Institute for Economic and Social Development (INADES) in Abidjan (Ivory Coast) which was founded in 1962, and has later become Centre for Research and Action for Peace (CERAP); the Centre for Studies and Social Action (CEPAS) in DRC that has now existed for over fifty years; the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), established in 1988 in Zambia; Jesuit Hakimani Centre (JHC) that was founded in 2001.

The contextual challenges (e.g., violent conflicts, refugees and migrations, poverty and famine, underdevelopment) necessitated the founding of academic institution, the Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations in 2004, where the issues are studied and researched, professionals in the field of peace-conflict studies and international relations are developed, and where local solutions are advanced both academically and through dialogue with all stakeholders (academic, practitioners, communities, civil organisations and civil servants). There was a felt need to produce local scholars who would have *emic* understanding of the African situations which dialectically interact with *etic* understanding, thus avoiding one-sided view of African situations.

What have we done so far?

Until 2012, the focus was almost on academic side, offering MA programme, encouraging students reflect critically, to have sufficient *etic* knowledge, to write research theses focussing on the relevant issues the African countries and the continent faces. These issues range from ethnic, resource-based/environmental, economic, socio-political, cultural, diplomatic, security, refugees, now human trafficking to global and local state/non-state actors (e.g. organisations).

The Institute's mission is to engage in "integral human formation based on academic excellence, training in the theory and practice of peacebuilding and international relations, policy research, conflict monitoring, foreign policy analysis, advocacy, research and publication as well as inculcation of spiritual values." The institute is imbued with Ignatian spirituality and pedagogy in line with long Jesuit tradition. We have, within our limited capacity, been carrying out our mission and will continue. For instance, within the 13 years of its existence, the Institute has thus far trained men and women able to engage in addressing the conflict issues of the continent. So far, the Institute has graduated 151 professionals in the field; on 17 Nov 2017, we will have other 21 more students graduated, making the total above 170. Among those who have thus far completed, some have pursued their studies until PhD and became academics; others are working in both local and international civil-organisations; and some others in government ministries. These men and women are now well equipped with intellectual tools to teach in the higher institutions, to research and write, to provide critical analysis of conflicts not only in Africa but throughout the world, able to provide/recommend context-sensitive solutions, and able to work in different cultural settings in peacebuilding activities with governmental and non-governmental organisations.

However, the two years' MA programme is only for a few elites who are academically gifted and able to finance. Academically talented ones from poor and struggling families are not even able to come and join the programme. The capacity of the Institute is also small since it deals with MA programme alone. Consequently, the Institute's impact and mission in the area of promoting peace and social transformation remains limited. The impact of about 170 graduates that the Institute has produced during 13 years looks like a few drops in the

ocean. These have created a felt need in bringing the knowledge to more actors: the grassroots, the middle level, and the top-level actors. It has become clear that academic training alone does not suffice to make substantial impact in building peaceful societies in the continent. Partly, the number of academically trained professionals is very low. The fact of the continuous existence of protracted conflicts at the grassroots that still seems to be easily instrumentalised by the corrupt self-centred elites, this despite the efforts of many civil organisations, shows still a long way to go.

Since 2012, HIPSIR has been engaged in providing targeted and certified one to three weeks' trainings in the areas of governance, human rights, catholic social teachings, conflict analysis, conflict resolution, trauma healing, reconciliation, election preparedness, leadership and project management: these as a way of building capacities both at the grassroots and middle levels. These involved pupils, women groups at the grassroots, faith-based organisations (e.g., the Catholic Justice and Peace Commissions [CJPC]), CBOs, NGOs, governmental organisations, local government officials, youth groups, religious groups, and other interested individuals. Within the last five years, the Institute has thus far passed the knowledge to no less than 1500 individuals who belong to the above mentioned groups. Although so far the Institute's engagement has been in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, and to some extent Ethiopia, the majority of those empowered have been from Kenya.

After each training, the trainees return to their places, set up one day stakeholders (including HIPSIR representatives) meeting to have them produce their action plans. HIPSIR has been following up the grassroots organisations that it has been training and supporting to make sure that they are implementing their projects to transform their milieus. Where they face challenges in implementing, HIPSIR helps them in contacting relevant authorities to facilitate their works. Moreover, the Institute organises for them extra-training, under the principle of "Do no harm", on how to take actions where need be, group dynamics, SWOT analysis in their projects and actions, ways of handling their conflicts within the organisation, how to spot leaders, what they should look for in a leader (qualities) and how to choose leaders within their community, at the County level and national level, going beyond parochialism or ethnic bias.

Overall, the outcomes are very encouraging; the people feel empowered and confident, happy and are undertaking their projects. For instance, in the institute trained artisans and sand-miners in Kitui-Kenya on their rights, what they needed to know with regard to extractive industries, key stakeholders, and who to contact in order to guarantee their rights. They showed a lot of appreciations, saying 'this is what we needed'; and are now sufficiently empowered to be able to negotiate well with extractive industries to protect their rights and interests. Their joy and sense of confidence encourages us to continue reaching out the grassroots in the process of fighting for justice and human rights and building peace.

Recently, Fr. Elias and support members were in Kisumu-Kenya mapping peacebuilders, and assessing what has been going on to find out whether there is anything else missing, so as to re-strategize our actions. We have not yet settled down to hear the findings.

Apart from these, HIPSIR is also involved in researches and opening avenues for dialogue among scholars, practitioners, civil organisations, and stakeholders through monthly forums and biannual international conferences. The biannual conferences are followed by publications. Moreover, HIPSIR organises annually student-led conferences to encourage graduate and post-graduate students reflect and debate on topical current issues that the students themselves come up with. It is attended by students from graduate and undergraduate levels. To see the students passionately debating on pertinent issues is very encouraging.

HIPSIR has tried to empower, both academically and non-academically, the grassroots and the middle-level actors in Kenya and beyond. Top level actors have remained slippery, and are the ones causing more and more problems; and HIPSIR, although made efforts to engage them in the training, has not yet managed to touch the core decision-makers. The main lesson we have come to appreciate is that despite our efforts still much more training is needed. The future peace of the continent depends on much more concerted actions to reach out actors at all levels, but more in the building of a society where at least most of its members are able to make autonomous decisions without being easily swayed by the political elite, a society where the members are well aware of its rights and obligations. For this to happen, well-coordinated networking and collaboration is essential for one

institution alone cannot achieve it. There is also a great need to produce a lot of academics and professionals in the areas of peace and conflict studies so as to have sufficient teachers and trainers at all levels of educational institutions, i.e., from primary to tertiary levels. Peace education and skills in conflict resolution should be mandatory courses for primary and secondary schools. There is still a lot of need for building a well conscious, empowered and organised population at the grassroots throughout the countries.

One of the key objectives of HIPSIR is to “promote synergy between the Institutions and the Catholic Church in the region by way of a close collaboration between the universities, research centres, justice and peace commissions, various levels of Caritas and social communications services.” Have we done anything in this area? Yes, but still more to do. We have not still trained the Catholic bishops and the clergy in the areas of peacebuilding; we have not empowered them yet to have united and active engagement in challenging the governments for peaceful world. We will need to make efforts to reach out to them for the possibility of empowering them with the knowledge.

What are our successes?

Our strengths are well dedicated faculty that has been able to produce quality human resource in the area of peacebuilding and conflict resolution: some are involved full time in the field of mediation as professional mediators; some are now serving in academic institutions; some others serve as researchers, professional trainers, and key players in civil organisations; some are working in governmental institutions.

Specifically, the institute is happy to have produced qualified personnel to teach in the institutions that have peace programmes up to BA level. In this way, the knowledge of peacebuilding can multiply to reach as many as possible. We only hope that these graduates will make impact in the process of building a peaceful continent.

Our institute also has conducive space for dialogue through forums, workshops and seminars, and conferences. We also have very good academic resources (books and journals) in the field of peace and conflict studies and international relations.

Currently, we are also in the process of having online programmes. We are building necessary online facilities to try to expand our reach to many people.

What challenges have we faced?

The main challenge for us has been an interrelated human and material resource. The vast majority of those who want to undertake peace and conflict studies are unable to finance their studies, and HIPSIR does not have scholarship fund to help them. Not having material means has also affected HIPSIR's hiring of more academics and expanding the education both to undergraduate and PhD levels. Perhaps this is where collaboration among the institutions that provide peace and conflict studies is necessary. HIPSIR also does not have research fund which can give the faculty members to carry out researches in the areas of their interests. We are mainly controlled by the interests of the donors who set up the agenda for research. Lack of sufficient academics also affects the ability of the faculty members to carry out much research because they have workloads both from academic and administrative dimensions. For instance, it is not uncommon for a staff to have between seven and thirteen MA theses to handle, both as supervisor and reader, every year on top of full time teaching with no teaching assistants, and other administrative works.

And how did we manage? We have been so far functioning with the few we have; we have been collaborating with other institutions and donor agencies; we have been able to carry out the projects of empowering the grassroots and middle level actors with the help of donor agencies.

What challenges are we facing?

Apart from the continuing resource challenge, our particular challenge at this moment in the area of socio-political transformation in the IGAD region is how to influence significantly the political elites, those at the top echelon. To remove the people at the grassroots from ethnic-based approach to politics remains also a challenge requiring more creative approaches. Without ignoring colonial and external factors to Africa's woes, the African political elites have been the most responsible elements that have retarded and are preventing the continent from moving forward in having socio-politically and economically transformed societies. Africa does not lack intelligent and creative people. Those who are

to harness this energy for the good of the continent have harassed and undermined them, contributing to brain-drain.

Conclusion

All said and done, given the magnitude of conflicts and violence we still experience, we do not have other more viable options than education in peace and justice. Since offering knowledge and skills is empowerment, education in understanding and addressing conflict and violence constructively and advocating for justice remain fundamental. To approach collaboratively with all tertiary institutions that offer degrees in peace studies and conflict resolution will help greatly.

Current contexts and needs multiple approach: workshops and seminars for older generations, peace caravans for youth with inputs such as presentation of cases and training them on how to go about; Compulsory subject right from primary school to secondary schools; and academic field of specialisation at tertiary level to produce professionals): we need concerted efforts to build peace cultures glocally.