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Dynamics of Peace and Implications on Security in a “Volatile Zone”: A Reflection on Structural Factors of Conflict in Zambia

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Abstract

For a period of time, Zambia has been considered a “Zone of Peace”. This is due to the peace dividends that the country has hitherto enjoyed since it gained independence in 1964, notwithstanding the fact that most of its neighbours such as DR Congo and Angola have been engulfed in protracted conflicts and civil wars. However, the notion of a “Zone of Peace” is being challenged by the increasing incidences of conflicts that have been experienced in the recent past. Violent conflicts have been rampant especially during electioneering period. This paper, therefore, seeks to interrogate the structural drivers of conflict in Zambia. The paper commences from the premise that, violent conflicts experienced in the recent past are rooted in structural factors. As such, factors including poverty, unemployment, marginalisation, militarisation of political cadres and weak political party institutions are discussed in detail. The paper concludes by recommending the establishment of a National Peace Architecture (NPA) that will anchor peace building mechanisms with a view of creating harmonised, integrated, and cohesive approaches to preventing violent conflicts, sustaining peace and social cohesion in Zambia.

Key Words: Zambia, Peace, Structural Factors, Conflict, Security

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By

Oita Etyang and Tunji Namaiko

Introduction

Unlike some of its neighbours, Zambia’s political history has been relatively stable since independence in 1964. Zambia has been free of civil wars or violent conflicts despite being surrounded by some countries experiencing the same. Whilst three attempted coups have been recorded (1980, 1990 and 1997) Zambia has generally experienced peaceful transitions and political party turnover. In 2021 for instance, Zambia held a general election that resulted in a peaceful political transition where the incumbent Patriotic Front (PF) lost elections to the opposition party – United Party for National Development (UPND).

During the one-party rule, Zambia remained relatively stable under the mantra of “*one Zambia, one Nation*” that encapsulated Kaunda’s quest for national cohesion. Kaunda pursued national unity by building deliberate patronage networks. Through the system of ethnic balancing, Kaunda appointed ethnic elites into government, ensured traditional chiefs were on his side and wooed different ethnic constituencies to establish ethnic coalitions. (Ihonvbere, 1996). The attempt at ethnic balancing in public service appointments ended up creating a bloated bureaucracy and entrenching the culture of corruption and impunity in government. These factors coupled with shrinking political space and economic struggles of the 1980s gave impetus to the agitation for the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1991. Successive regimes after the introduction of multiparty politics continued with a culture of neo-patrimonialism that awaken ethnic identities that are manifested through violent confrontations during electioneering period.

Although ushered in through the wave of multi-party democracy, the Chiluba administration closed the democratic space and enacted restrictive laws against civil society organizations (CSOs) and the media, in addition to amending the constitution. The constitutional amendment not only weakened the powers of the judiciary, but it also effectively preventing certain persons from contesting the elections. The amended Constitution imposed new requirements on persons seeking to hold the office of president to be of purely Zambian parentage. The constitutional amendments also resulted in elite fragmentation along ethnic lines that has continued to manifest in government, and in the organisation of political parties. After the 2016 elections, the perpetuation of ethnicity in government continued through the disproportionate appointment of people from a specific ethnic group (Ngoni) into cabinet and other important positions in the bureaucracy (Habasonda, 2018).

While ethnicity on its own does not lead to conflict, it has been instrumentalised thus making it a potential trigger for identity-based violence in Zambia. As argued by Staub (2009), if such dichotomisation is not addressed, it is not only likely to lead to violent action, but it is likely to degenerate into “pathologically defensive action against a perceived existential threat.” Whereas Zambia has in the past been considered a model of peace and

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stability in the Southern Africa region, intermittent violence especially during elections period triggers academic curiosity on the underlying structural factors that trigger conflicts.

Statement of the Problem

The veneer of peace being experienced in Zambia is perplexing given the fact that one third of both intra and inter-state conflicts have been recorded in Africa (Brosché, 2015). A body of research has emerged to explain this state of affairs. In a study of “zones of peace” that consisted of Botswana, Malawi and Zambia as case studies, (Brosché, 2015) established that weak ethno-religious identity, political tolerance, pacification of poverty and strong peace institutions have, for a long period, contributed to peace and stability in Zambia. Abbink, (2014) and Hingoma (2015) corroborate this finding in their various studies. However, the recent sporadic violence related to elections tends to question these findings. Indeed, the recent violent episodes experienced in Zambia have triggered questions as to the efficacy of Abbink (2014), Brosché (2015), and Hingoma (2016) suppositions. Further it has brought into question the utility of peace institutions in mitigating conflicts. These studies tend to ignore the emerging trends of both latent and manifest conflicts. In the recent past, conflict incidences have been on the increase in Zambia. The incidences have been more prevalent during electioneering period. It is based on this recent experience of violence that this article seeks to demystify the traditional classification of Zambia as “a zone of peace”. This article is organised in three parts. Party one debunks the concept peace, part two discusses the historical foundation of peace in Zambia and party three which forms the crux of this article interrogates the structural causes of conflict with Zambia as a unit of analysis.

Review of Related Literature

Unpacking the Concept Peace

The concept of peace incorporates a wide range of meaning and often invokes idiosyncratic connotations (Höglund and Kovacs, 2010:370). By implication, this concept can be quite complex and defined in a number of ways, depending on the context and geographical space. However, despite its complexities, it is imperative to define and measure peace (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015a:7). Peace has often been described as a state of rest, freedom, quietness and break from civil disorder and war (University of Peace, 2009). This ‘state’ is what Galtung (1964:2), calls the “integration of human society.” Other interlocutors have construed peace to imply a world free of violent conflict stemming from ethnic, cultural, religious, or political differences, while to others, it represents the promotion of democracy, justice, and human rights. Although all the perspectives are important, facets of peace, denoting stability and solidarity are potentially contentious and unacceptable in some societies (University of Peace, 2009). Nevertheless, peace is generally good and worth promoting in either positive or negative sense; hence, they are both valuable, but for different reasons (Hoyer, 2013:12). Regan (2016) argues that “defining peace as the absence of war makes sense for scholars interested in the understanding of the conditions that generate war and other forms of violence”.

From peace and conflict studies lens, there are two definitions of peace: negative peace and positive peace that the article finds critical in debunking the concept. According to Hoyer (2013:12) “negative peace as a concept focuses on reducing or ending war and all physical violence”. In this context, therefore, negative peace is construed as the absence of

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violence and fear of violence. This is, in fact, an intuitive definition of peace that many scholars and practitioners agree with and is more easily measured than other definitions of peace. Negative peace depicts traditional typologies of violence, an interpersonal violence of direct physical, sexual and psychological nature committed by family members, acquaintances and strangers, or collective violence driven by cultural, political, economic manifestation (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015:27). It also depicts three of the seven categories of threats to human security, namely personal security, communal security and political security (UNDP, 2017:27). However, it should be noted that the word negative is not intended to have any connotations of negative assessment with it. Instead, it signals that peace can be defined merely as the absence of something or the other. On the other hand, positive peace can be defined as the attitudes and structures that create, promote, and sustain peace in societies (Institute for Economic and Peace (2015:9). Royce (2004:103) construe positive peace as a continuous and challenging process that requires societal collective efforts. To him, it is “a condition in which individuals, families, groups, communities and/or nations experience low level of violence and engage in mutually harmonious relations.”

Despite the definition morass, peace is not the inverse or mirror image of war; hence, understanding peace requires different theoretical orientations and explanatory variables. Furthermore, the conventional methods of establishing negative peace are not sufficient for creating lasting peace (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015). This is what makes negative peace problematic as analytical concept, because, a country can achieve negative peace (absence of war) but continue to experience structural factors of conflict such as high poverty levels, limited access to social services, continuing violence and human rights violations (Goertz et al. 2019). These factors are structural in nature and can exacerbate delicate situations in any polity. Therefore, if these factors are not adequately addressed, they remain the main causes of conflict in any society. It is this understanding and the desire to inform policies that informs the discussions in this article.

Historical Foundations of Peace in Zambia and the Underlying Explanatory Factors

Zambia attained its independence in October 1964 under President Kenneth Kaunda. Kaunda through his ideological mantra of humanism advocated for peace not only in Zambia but to the Southern African region. Suffice to mention that Zambia was instrumental in the liberation of most Southern African countries. Zambia was also instrumental in supporting the peace process in the Democratic Republic of Congo that led to the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement on 10th July 1999.

Domestically, Zambia has remained peaceful despite a number of failed coups attempts by the military. Certainly, conflicts have generally been resolved through non-violent means, mostly through the courts, whose decisions are generally accepted. The relative peace can be attributed to different factors. First, the proponents of Zambia as a “zone of peace” attribute the relative peace to its ethnic composition or what Burnell (2005:9) calls *social composition and state-society fit*. Burnell supposition can be interrogated along “primordialist-instrumentalist fault line”. Burnell interrogates the ethnic composition of Zambia and concludes that the ethno-linguistic composition pattern makes it favourable for peace and stability to prevail. He avers that none of the approximately 73 ethnic communities have held an absolute majority therefore “this demographic profile probably means [that] Zambia never was a strong candidate for extensive inter-communal violence.” What this implies is that the level of ethnic polarisation is still low, and the level of internal cohesion

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(cemented by interethnic marriages) is high therefore preventing ethnic violent conflicts. This observation is augmented with the fact that Zambia is largely a Christian nation where the principles of brotherhood and good neighbourliness are cherished. Christian overtones such as “blessed are the peacemakers” has been upheld and practised. This has, overtime, translated to ethnic cohesion.

Secondly, some scholars such as Burnell (2005) and Smith-Höhn (2009) have advanced the argument that the existence of political parties with national outlook has been critical in propagating peace in Zambia. From the onset, United National Independence Party (UNIP), being a monolithic independent party, organised itself as a nationalistic party for promoting national cohesion. It championed a nationalistic agenda with structures in all parts of the country. The party drew support from all ethnic groups. The founding father, Kenneth Kaunda, used UNIP as a vehicle for entrenching national unity through the famous aphorism of “*one Zambia, one nation.*” With the reintroduction of multipartyism, the UNIP influence waned in most parts of the region. In the 1990s, Movement for Multiparty Democracy emerged as a movement party that brought all the ethnic groups together. The unity of purpose that informed the formation of political parties then, was instrumental in consolidating peace and stability in Zambia.

Closely linked to the unitary parties, was ideology. Generally, ideology has been critical in promoting peace and stability in many societies. In most cases, it has been used as a rallying call to action. In essence, it acts as a centripetal force that pulls a people together. This is achieved through shared beliefs, values, and principles. In Zambia, President Kaunda introduced humanism as an ideology for promoting peace and unity. Through humanism, he advocated for socio-economic and political emancipation of the Zambia people. To Kaunda, society could be peaceful and stable if people cared, respected and worked together. Kaunda’s deliberate policy of social re-engineering during the 1980s certainly contributed to the lack of ethnic tensions. The policy contributed to a greater sense of patriotism, oneness and social cohesion. The policy also led to economic stability.

In the immediate post-independence period, Zambia enjoyed an economic boom buoyed by high copper prices. Access to wealth and other social economic amenities by most citizens across the country further consolidated peace and stability. It by and large defused polarising ethnic undertones. The policy galvanised the different ethnic groups into one indivisible and cohesive unit. The policy entrenched the spirit and sense of “we-ness”. Despite its utility, Kaunda’s humanism as a tool for promoting peace and stability has been criticised from different front. Kanu (2014) for example avers that Kaunda’s humanism had failed in the economic fronts. It failed to emancipate the Zambian people from the incumbrance of economic difficulties. Kanu (2014:376) avers that “by the mid-1980s, the country was worse off economically than it had been at the time of independence”. The criticisms notwithstanding, Kaunda’s humanism was instrumental in weaving together the Zambia’s social fabric.

Third, the institution of the chiefs or rather traditional leaders played a crucial role in supporting the peace architecture in Zambia. Certainly, in most traditional African societies, traditional leaders have supported peace processes and managed communal conflicts using various traditional mechanism. The peace and conflict initiatives by traditional elders have culminated in intra and inter community cohesion. As heads of communities bequeathed with “veto powers” to make decisions on behalf of the larger commonwealth, they have a critical role to foster peace. However, it is important to note that in some Africa societies – in South

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Africa and Mozambique for example, traditional leaders have been accused of fanning violence in society (see for example Mamdani, 1996 and Ntsembeza, 2004).

The accusation notwithstanding, traditional leaders are considered important because they promote reconciliation, build social relations, settle disputes and manage conflicts before they escalate (Choudree, 1999). In Zambia the institution of chieftaincy has largely managed to uphold values of peace in the interest of the nation and community. It can be argued that Zambia is among the few African states that have maintained the institution of chiefs at the national level. More importantly the institution (the House Chiefs) is established and regulated by the constitution (Binsbergen, 1987:140). Besides promoting peace and solving conflicts in their areas of jurisdiction, the chiefs in Zambia play other important roles such as safeguarding and promoting cultural values and customs, regulating societal behaviour, custodians of the traditional land, and presiding over traditional ceremonies (Chibomba, 2004:3). These roles are aimed at promoting and safeguarding societal peace and stability for the benefit of posterity.

Fourth, is urbanisation. Zambia is one of the most urbanised African countries in the Southern Africa region. Approximately 42 per cent of the population live in urban areas (Central Statistical Office, 2018). This has had a profound impact on the evolution of ethnic relations in Zambia. Urbanisation has perhaps contributed towards mitigating ethnic tensions, with indigenous Zambians living peacefully side by side in the various major towns. Inter-faith led dialogues have also previously contributed to peace and social cohesion. The role played by the church in negotiating a peaceful transition from a one-party state to multi-party democracy in 1991 cannot be over-emphasised. Furthermore, there are also several examples of instances when the church and especially the Catholic Bishops have strongly intervened against perceived institutionalisation by Government on issues of corruption, negative ethnicity, political and economic exclusion, marginalisation of the periphery by the centre among other factors.

While the electoral violence experienced in the recent past and the periodic public violence being reported in various provinces (negative peace) is not commensurate to violence incidences being recorded in other countries in the region, the emerging trend is worrisome. It is based on these emerging trends that this article questions the viability of Zambia as a “zone of peace”. Some factors that mitigated conflict as discussed above have waned with time. Kaunda’s unitary ideology clothed in the principle of “one Zambia, one people” for instance, disappeared with the defeat of UNIP in 1991 elections. The role of the church and traditional institutions as fountains of societal peace have been questioned by citizens - especially the perceived partisan role in politics (*Lusaka Times*, 3 November 2009). The next section attempts to interrogate the causes of recent conflicts that make the article conclude that Zambia is no longer a zone of peace as traditionally perceived but a zone to be closely watched.

Methodology

In terms of methodology, the article follows a case study approach and is premised on an interpretivist epistemology, largely dependent on both primary and secondary dataset (Williams, 2000: 210). As regards primary data, documentary evidence and in-depth interviews proved useful. The qualitative data was collected in the months of September and October 2017. In-depth interviews were conducted with local leaders, political elites and independent consultants knowledgeable with Zambia socio-economic and political evolution

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since independence. Data from these groups of respondents was analysed and synthesised with data obtained from secondary sources such as academic books, journal papers, national newspapers and policy papers published by research institutions. Data from these sources were infused to strengthen the article’s position on thematic areas.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Emerging Conflict Trends in Zambia

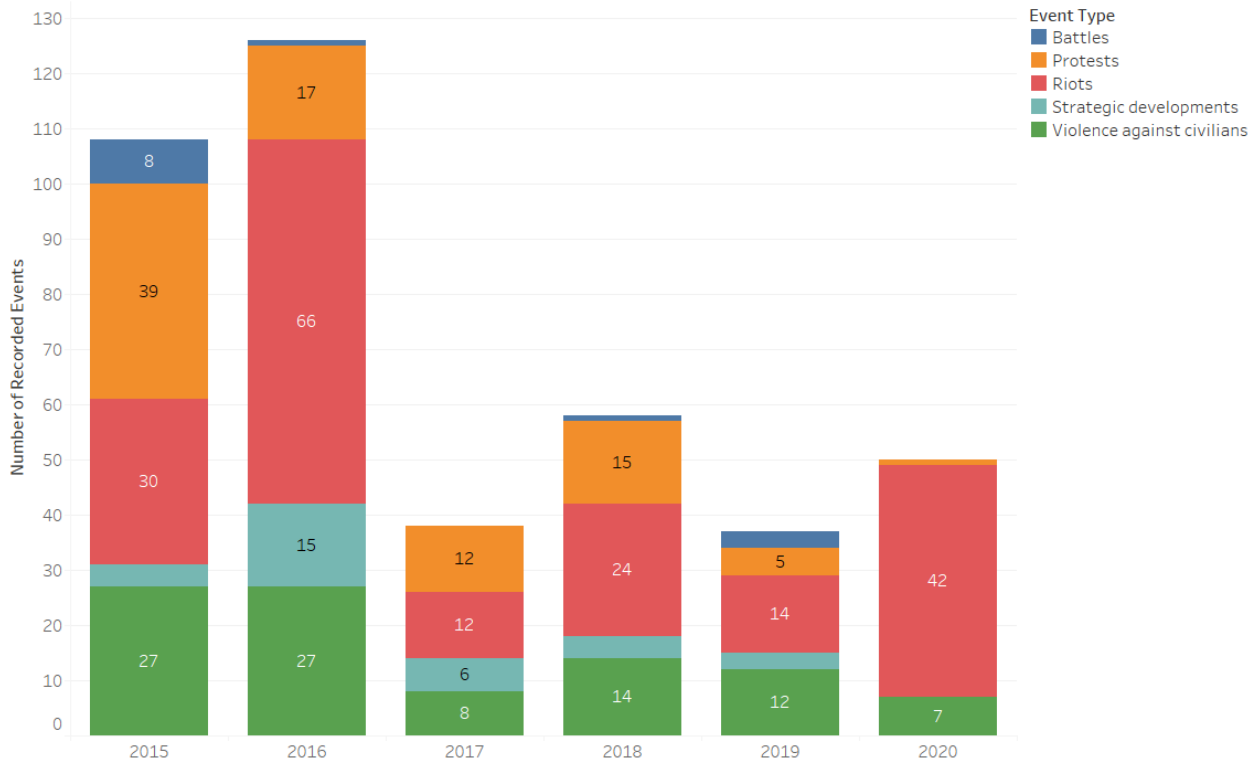
As alluded to above, Zambia’s positioning as a zone of peace is being undermined by various socio-economic, political and cultural factors. Structural inequalities are on an upward trajectory with increasing perceptions among the citizenry of marginalisation of the periphery by the centre through economic and political exclusion. Politicisation and weaponisation of ethnicity have ruptured community relations along identity lines thereby weakening social cohesion and greatly undermining the mantra of “One Zambia one Nation.” The state through the police is increasingly being militarised while generally, there is growing political intolerance and violence among competing political parties as cadres and their parties are becoming more militarised - many carry guns and other crude weapons, while some walk around with (para)military regalia. Many a times they employ armed militia tactics to intimidate their perceived political opponents.

The period preceding the 2016 election witnessed growing violent clashes between main rival parties. A cursory look at Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) indicates that the number of conflict events (battles, protests, riots and violence against civilians) were high in the periods 2015, 2016 and 2018. ACLED data further indicate that incidences of conflict are likely to escalate in 2020 as the country moves towards the 2021 tripartite elections. Mid-year data for 2020 indicates that 50 conflict incidences have already been reported as compared to 19 incidences in 2019 in the same period. Based on ACLED data and discussions with key informants, it can be deduced that:

- a. The conflict trends especially during electioneering period are on the rise in Zambia
- b. There are many deep-rooted vulnerabilities that act as drivers of conflict that are manifesting in various forms.
- c. The countries’ current architectures for responding to and managing emerging trends of conflict in a timely manner needs re-evaluation.

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Number of all recorded events by event type in Zambia from Jan 1, 2015 to May 16, 2020 (Source: ACLED)



Source: ACLED

The increase in the number of conflict incidences in 2015, 2016 is attributed to elections. Elections has been considered as an important process in democratic development, however if not conducted and regulated in a proper way, then the “attendant returns such as peace and security are imperiled” (Mukunto, 2019:139). The January 2015 presidential by-election for example, was characterised by violence and political antagonism between the two leading parties – PF and UPND. Similarly, the August 2016 elections was marred by unprecedented violence. Mukunto (2019:135) observes that the culture of electoral violence reached its pick in 2016 as political parties jostled for power. Majority of the conflict incidences report in 2020 are also linked to political party rivalry. Currently, the re-organisation and realignment of political elites in preparation for the 2021 elections is fueling conflict among parties’ supporters. It is more likely that the conflict incidences will increase rapidly as the 2021 elections approaches.

Causes of Conflict in Zambia

There are a number of threats to peace and social cohesion in Zambia. At the forefront of driving the conflict are causes that are structural in nature. The structural factors tend to escalate as a result of root or systemic causes that are rooted in the socio-economic and political history. Clark (1989) defines structural factors as underlying conditions, structures and systems that have existed for many years, and are mostly static or change slowly over time, and so form the basis for long-term risk assessment. Structural factors in most cases tend to be embedded in historical/cultural and institutional contexts such as unequal

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integration in the global political economy, multi-ethnic or sectarian conflicts, political and economic marginalisation, long-standing border disputes, and poverty among others. For purposes of description and analysis, root causes are thus necessary but not sufficient causes for conflict escalation. They, however, create the fertile conditions that make a country or region ripe for conflict. In most cases the structural factors are instrumentalised by political actors, thus, leading to violent conflicts. We argue that the recent conflicts experienced in Zambia are embedded in structural factors. We proceed to discuss some of these structural factors as follows:

Militarisation of Party Cadres

Historically, party cadres were considered important in building strong political parties. During the colonial period, the youth were instrumental in the liberation struggles. However, their role by design was subdued in the post-independence period. The removal of the youth from political process can be attributed to the generational political contestations that emerged after independence that favoured the old generation as was the case in South Africa and Zimbabwe, among others (Everatt, 2016; Twala, 2017). With the re-introduction of multiparty politics in early 1990s in most African states, the role of the youth in politics has been amplified. Party cadres and youth leagues have emerged as platforms for youth to participate in the political marketplace. Their roles have been prominent in political parties. They are mostly charged with the responsibilities of propagating party ideals. They are the link between the parties and the masses. They recruit members and ensure that political party values and principles are propagated in the society.

Recent studies, however, have indicated that the cadres or youth leagues have failed to execute these functions and on the contrary, perpetuate political violence. According to (Abbink, 2014), the role of party cadres in contemporary Africa has been mostly violent. Youths are easily enlisted by political parties sometime for armed or criminal activities (Abbink, 2014). In the case of Zambia, political parties have enlisted youthful party cadres into their ranks. The enlisting of the youth into party cadres is traced to the one-party stated. The United National Independence Party (UNIP) enlisted youths into its ranks to propagate party ideals.

According to (Mukunto, 2019:141) the cadres had an added responsibility of “taking care” of perceived party “enemies”. Since then, political parties that have emerged in the post 1990 period have recruited youths into their ranks and file. Their roles remain amorphous. They have failed to propagate the traditional roles of cadres as highlighted above. They have been associated with violent conflicts during electioneering period. The local dailies are awash with cases of violence associated with party cadres. A former police officer in Lusaka (Interview, 26 August 2017) contended that party cadres have been in the forefront in fomenting electoral conflicts.

On 7th September 2017 for example, PF and UPND cadres engaged in violent conflict in a ward by-election in Chilanga (Namaiko and Etyang, 2017). The violent conflict resulted in many injuries and destruction of property. The notoriety of party cadres is more prevalent in Patriotic Front (PF) and United Party for National Development (UPND) (Interview: Monde, 26 August 2017). The violent conflicts orchestrated by the cadres in most cases take the form of assaults, disruption of meetings and armed attacks on perceived opponents. In May 2016 for instance, UPND cadres were accused of disrupting a PF meeting in Monze

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(*Daily Mail*, 1 May 2016). On the hand, on 9 May 2016 UPND accused PF cadres of disrupting their meeting in Matero constituency (*Lusaka Times*, 9 May 2016).

Cadres are known to carry crude weapons such as machetes and *pangas*. Some even carry guns publicly. An interviewee reported that politicians have always recruited and financed party cadre activities (Interview: Patriotic Front (PF) Youth Leader, in Kabwe, 27 July 2017). The ability to make easy money from politicians makes ‘cadre-ism’ attractive. As a result, youths find refuge in cadre-ism as a means of making easy money from politicians. The article notes that cadres have been used to invade private land leading to violent confrontation. Interestingly, some party cadres operate like security agents; they move around clad in military regalia and provide security to politicians (Interview: UPND Youth Leader, in Choma, 15 October 2017). This has made them ruthless in their actions especially when dealing with perceived opponents. Party cadres have also been known to abuse drugs. Marijuana and alcohol are the most abused drugs especially during electioneering period. The use of drugs makes the youth easily irritable at the slightest provocation. The use of drugs tends to instil a sense of bravado that is manifested in violent conflict that leads to gross violation of people’s rights. Suffice to mention that party cadres are the biggest violators of the electoral code of conduct.

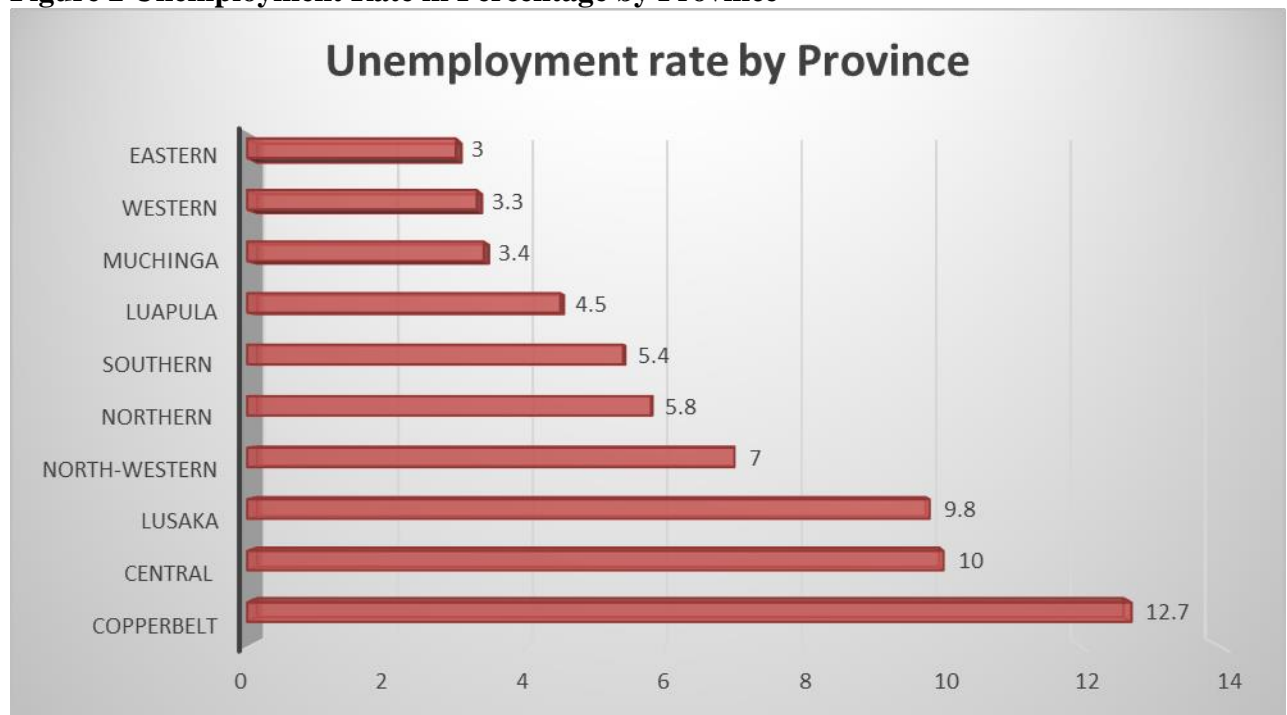
Unemployment

The national average unemployment rate in Zambia is estimated at 7.4 percent (Central Statistics Office Zambia, 2019) The high rate of unemployment in Zambia is linked to the declining economic performance of hitherto viable sectors such as mining, tourism, and agriculture. The Africa Development Bank (2020) in its analysis of Zambia’s economic outlook reported that the real GDP growth had slowed to an estimated 2 percent in 2019 as compared to 4 percent in 2018.

The trend of the total unemployed indicate that 35.2 percent were in rural areas as compared to 64.8 percent in urban centres percent (Central Statistics Office, Zambia, 2019). Cascaded to the level of province, unemployment data indicate that Copperbelt, Central and Lusaka have the highest rate of unemployment at 12.7 percent, 10 percent and 9.8 percent above the national average percent (Central Statistics Office, Zambia, 2019:64). Demographically, average national youth unemployment rate was at 10.5 percent. Higher rates of youth unemployment are recorded in urban areas as compared to the rural areas. Statistics indicate that there are more male persons who are unemployed (12.2 percent) as compared to female persons at 9.1 percent. The prevalence of youth unemployment in the Copperbelt, Central and Lusaka provinces may give insights to why the three provinces have recorded high incidences of violent conflicts and crimes in the recent past. According to crime statistics for third quarter (2019), Copperbelt (2,113) and Lusaka (1994) recorded the highest numbers of crime reported as compared to other provinces – 2113 cases and 1994 cases respectively (Zambia Police, 2019)

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Figure 2 Unemployment Rate in Percentage by Province



Source: Central Statistics Office Zambia (2019)

There is a lot of literature on the relationship between unemployment and violence/crime (See for example, Urdal (2006); Goertz, et al. (2019); Gouda and Twala, (2017); and Tongeren (2014). Urdal (2006) for instance, argues that rampant unemployment coupled with burgeoning youth bulge are associated with violent conflict. Using data from Gallup World Poll, Bhatia and Ghanem (2013:15), conclude that “individuals with secondary educations who are unemployed or underemployed have the highest risk of becoming radicalised.” Bhatia and Ghanem (2017) vignette imply that lack of unemployment especially for youths with formal education, is a push factor towards violence and crime. In Zambia, the study findings indicate that there is a strong acceptance of the assumption that unemployment is a push factor leading to both political violence and criminality. According to an interviewee, the high levels of unemployment being experienced in Zambia makes the youth susceptible to crime and violent conflicts (Interview; Police Officer in Kasama, 15 September 2017). As reported in the *Lusaka Times*, (28 January 2019):

There is no doubt that youth unemployment in Zambia does pose a serious threat to peace, security, political and economic stability, given that they make up a higher proportion of the Zambian population. The opportunity cost of not fighting youth unemployment is extremely high to the young people and the society. The consequences of youth unemployment include crime, alcohol and drug abuse, prostitution, violence including political violence, vandalisms, suicides, early marriages and of course a serious threat to the political stability of the country.

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The urban youth and those in compounds (Kanyama, Chibolya, Matero) which are densely populated are the most vulnerable. A Human Rights Officer, in Lusaka (Interview: 20 September 2017) attributed the high cases of theft, violent riots by urban vendors, political hooliganism, and fights and riots at bus stages being experienced periodically in Lusaka to the problem of youth unemployment. According to a police officer the study interacted with, a measurable number of youths have been involved in petty thievery and violence as they lack meaningful forms of livelihood (Interview: Police Officer in Lusaka, 21 September 2017).

Social disintegration or fragmentation is also associated with high levels of unemployment. Family break-ups in compounds increase with the trends of unemployment. An interviewee observed that most youths are unable to get jobs immediately after finishing school (Interview: A women Leader in Lusaka, 5 October 2017). As a result, majority of the youths relocate to urban centres in search of employment. The urban pressure pushes most of them into crime and violent activities especially during electioneering period. Politicians take advantage of the youth vulnerability to incite them into violence. To compound the problem, many youths do not have the necessary financial resources to start business ventures. Most fail to secure finances because they lack collateral required by banks and other financial institutions.

Poverty and Inequality

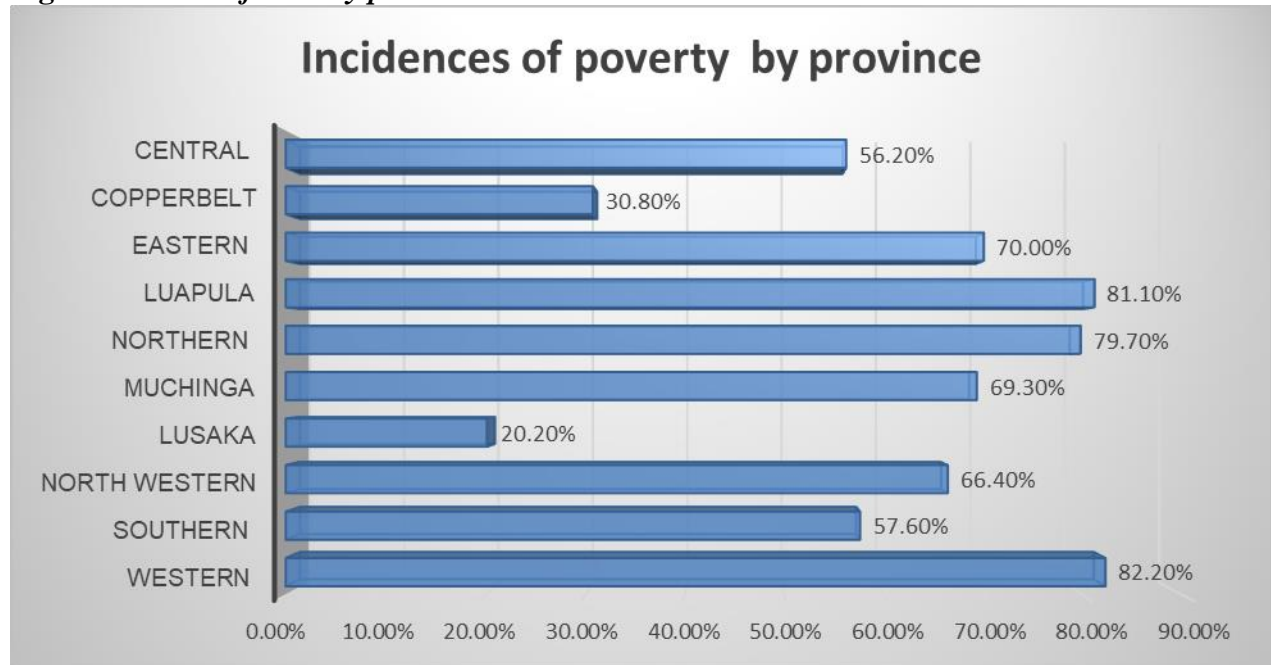
Studies in comparative sociology, have shown overwhelming evidence that poverty and inequality are profoundly linked to violence and crime (Currie, 1998; Kramer, 2000). Indeed, social deprivation theory popularly used in the field of sociology and criminology regards poverty and inequality as a major trigger of violent conflict. The underlying assumption is that the frustration and anger brought about by prolonged conditions of poverty and inequality is manifested through violence or crime (Neumayer, 2005).

In Zambia, poverty and inequality remain pervasive despite the Public Welfare Assistance Scheme (PWAS) introduced by the government to mitigate socio-economic shocks and other pandemic such as HIV, and AIDS. Recent trends in non-income human development indicators that include literacy, school enrolment, malnutrition, infant mortality, and maternal mortality broadly support the same conclusion. In relation to malnutrition for example, data from UNICEF indicate that the prevalence of stunting is at 40 percent. The report further notes that 9 percent of infants have low birth weight of less than 2.5 percent. According to UNICEF, this is an indication of intra-uterine growth retardation and maternal malnutrition (UNICEF, 2020). While maternal mortality rate defined as the risk of a woman dying during pregnancy and childbirth has reduced to an average of 398 deaths per 100,000 live births (World Bank, 2018:19), this number is still high as compared to other countries in the region.

A program officer with a local nongovernmental organisation in Lusaka attributes, among other factors, the high level of poverty being experienced to economic meltdown, unemployment and unpredictable weather patterns (Interview, 20 September 2017). According to data released by the Central Statistical Office (2018), the level of poverty at the national level was estimated at 54.4 percent. According to this report, the poverty level has predominantly remained high in the rural areas with statistical figures estimated at 76.6 percent as compared to 23.3 percent in urban areas (Central Statistical Office, 2018:32). In terms of geographical distribution, poverty levels are reported to be high in Western province

at 82.2 percent, followed by Luapula at 81.1 percent, Northern at 79.7 percent and Eastern at 70 percent (Central Statistical Office, 2018:31).

Figure 3 Levels of Poverty per Province



Source: Central Statistical Office, 2018

The discrepancies in the level of poverty in different provinces may be associated with unequal distribution of state resources, skewed development prioritisation and to some extent retrogressive cultural practices such as early marriages among other factors. This scenario builds a perception of marginalisation and creates “we vs them” mentality among the population that if not addressed in the long term may be a source of conflict as different groups fight for the limited resources. The feeling of marginalisation can easily be transformed into political grievances that can be used by political elites to mobilise a cross section of the population into violence. In a study conducted by Chapa (2017:12) it was established that poverty was one of the main causes of political violence in Luanshya district. This finding is in tandem with the views of some of the interviewees that we interacted with. A Governance Officer in Lusaka for example, noted that there is an emerging trend where poverty and inequality are fomenting a growing sense of frustration, hopelessness and helplessness (Interview, 20 September 2017). According to the officer, this provides a fertile ground for violent conflict. The officer avers that:

People are poor, majority feel marginalised and disenchanted with the state of affairs. This makes them susceptible to violence especially during the electioneering period. I am persuaded that some of the conflicts being experienced in Zambia is a result of poverty and inequality. Party cadres engage in violent conflict due to poverty; the youths have no jobs. Cadre-ism affords them an opportunity to make a living, they are therefore prepared to go

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to greater lengths to support their party, even if it means resorting to violence (Interview: Governance office in Lusaka, 20 September 2017).

Regionalism and Ethnic Power Politics

The concept ethnicity remains ubiquitous in peace and conflict studies. However, its definition remains disconcertingly far from precise. The common definition of ethnicity offered by different scholars such as Nnoli, (1995); Young (2002); Fearon, (2002) and Young (2007) tend to converge around some key elements that included language, history or ancestry, religion, shared cultural practice such as style of dress or adornment, common boundaries among other factors. Zambia consists of 73 indigenous ethnic groups in addition to a number of immigrant groups, most of whom are of Asian and European descent. By and large, Zambia has since independence enjoyed stable ethnic relations. This has been attributed to different factors as discussed above. However, the scenario has somewhat changed with latent and manifest conflicts with ethnic undertones being experienced in the country in the recent past, especially during electioneering period.

Posner (2005:56) for example attributes the emerging ethnicization of politics to policies, rules and regulations established by the Rhodesian colonial administration. According to him, these prompted Africa elites to invest in their ethnic identities. Social-ethnic cleavages are increasingly being featured in most of the conflicts being experienced for the following reasons. Firstly, there is a level of latent resentment of the prosperity of immigrant groups of Asian, Chinese and East African origin. The emerging resentment for example led to the killing of 3 Chinese in a warehouse Lusaka in May 2020 (Observer Research Foundation, 2020). These resentments have so far manifested in densely populated poor urban areas especially in Lusaka and some parts of the Copperbelt. Some of the reasons for this targeted resentment are poor service delivery and increased levels of poverty arising from weak economy, and difficulties by citizens to access wealth and other social amenities, fear that Chinese are taking over jobs at the bottom of the pyramid such as rearing chicken, selling second cloths among others. If not managed well, there is a danger of politicians exploiting xenophobic sentiments to garner more support for their campaigns and can lead to an escalation of conflict at elections time. As reported by Observer Research Foundation (2020):

There should be no pretense about the fact that the relationship between ordinary Zambian citizens and Chinese nationals is fraught with suspicions and mistrust in recent years unlike in the past. Zambians view Chinese as coming to take over their country. Zambians working for Chinese companies complain about low wages, poor working conditions of service, general mistreatment and racism.

Secondly, it is observable that there is increasing use of negative ethnicity in pursuit of political power. Ethnicity has been politicised by political elites thus sowing division. Formation of regional/ethnic parties has awakened ethnic consciousness. Politicians have been accused of using hate speech to polarise the electorates along ethnic lines. A cursory look at the 2016 presidential elections voting pattern between the two leading parties – PF and UPND, indicates regional/ethnic balkanisation of the country (see Figure 4). The two main presidential candidates received majority votes from their perceived regional/ethnic

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bloc as table 4 shows. It is evident that the UPND won decisively in Southern, North-Western and Western provinces. On the other hand, the PF won with a majority vote in Northern, Eastern, Muchinga and Luapula provinces. This scenario may be a source of conflict in successive elections if not addressed as was the case in Kenya in 2007 elections. What has trigger regional/ethnic voting in Zambia? Several factors are linked to this state affairs. Firstly, is perceived political and economic marginalisation. As result, majority of would-be voters prefer voting an ethnic or reginal leader closer to them. The second reason is linked to unresolved historical issues such as the settlement of the Barotseland Agreement for the case of Western province and inclusiveness of the Government.

The third reason is linked to the desire to assert one’s ethnic identity to show solidarity with co-ethnic members or to assert hostility against perceived outsiders. Lastly, ethnic voting is preferred as voters expect patronage rewards from ethnic leaders (Seekings, 2018:12). This trend underscores the fact that ethnicity remains a structural issue that could trigger violence. The inability by policy makers to respond to the challenges of managing a growing multi-ethnic society such as Zambia, poses a huge risk for escalation to crisis stage of the conflict and ultimately disrupt economic and governance process in the country, that include elections.

Table 4 Voting patterns in the 2016 presidential elections by province

#	Provinces	UPND – Results	PF – Results
1.	North-Western	208,414	28,859
2.	Luapula	35,929	205,770
3.	Northern	63,719	218,938
4.	Muchinga	25,761	159,345
5.	Eastern	62,321	299,249
6.	Lusaka	242,172	375,760
7.	Central	177,854	138,517
8.	Copperbelt	189,562	345,275
9.	Western	226,722	46,255
10.	Southern	527,893	42,909

Source: Electoral Commission of Zambia

Weak Political Parties

Institutions such political parties, police, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), judiciary among others play a critical role in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts in society. This role is in most cases achieved through internal conflict resolution mechanisms or through statutory powers bequeathed to these institutions. Indeed, the absence of strong institutions to manage conflicts exacerbates the problem. Data gathered from key informant’s interviews suggest that weak institutions have contributed to conflict in Zambia – more specifically, political parties. It can be argued that political parties in Zambia rarely mobilise on the basis of ideology. They are characterised by leadership struggle. The leadership struggles between Felix Mutati and Nevers Mumba in the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) over who is the bona-fide party leader fractured the party. The Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD) was characterised by leadership wrangles after Edith Nawakwi refused to relinquish the chairmanship despite serving for two terms as party leader. Political parties are fragmented with internal factions and lack properly constituted

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party structures. Furthermore, majority of political parties are centred on individuals, party hopping, and ethnicity continues to characterise the parties. Parties also lack internal discipline mechanism. Parties lack internal party tolerance. Party leaders with divergent views are always excommunicated from parties.

Factions within political parties have always led to violent conflicts. In February 2016 for example, two factions clashed in the MMD party secretariat leading to injuries and destruction of property (*Lusaka Times*, 8 February 2016). Secondly, lack of internal discipline has led to impunity within parties which in most cases culminate into violent confrontation. Party cadres have taken advantage of this situation and are creating havoc and impunity within and outside political parties. The party liaison committee under the supervision of the Electoral Commission has remained weak and passive in dealing with party matters. Whereas the conflict management committees have been instrumental in dealing with party conflicts during elections, their mandate is limited in scope, and they lack sufficient resources to effectively and efficiently deal with conflicts.

Conclusion

Increasingly, violent conflicts are becoming a reality around electioneering period. In Zambia, election related violent conflicts are becoming a permanent feature with every political contest. Political conflict actors polarise communities by taking advantage of the existing in-equalities portended by the social-economic factors. The discussed structural factors provide fertile grounds for conflict to erupt. It is urgently needed to analyse how Zambia could enhance sustainable peace. Establishing Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) or NPA could be an important pillar for such a plan. More focus should be given to long-term investment in capacities, mechanisms and structures for sustainable peace. Institutionalisation and funding for I4P is needed. Peace can be planned. In most cases violent escalation of conflicts can be prevented. Countries at risk of instability and civil war need mechanisms and structures for cooperation amongst all relevant stakeholders in peacebuilding. Institutional structures for peace create a forum for all peace actors for dialogue and cooperation. Evidence demonstrates that peace structures work.

Recommendations

Against this background, sustained peace and unity in Zambia implies continued provision of conditions that allow non-violent political discourse and democratic political change and successful socio-economic and technological development and unity in diverse cultures. The principles of national peace and unity are matters of consensus and are above sectoral interests. At present, Zambia has no well-established capacities or frameworks for conflict prevention, management and strengthening social cohesion. As conflict trends keep rising with each election cycle, the country is increasingly relying on traditional conflict management institutions such as the police and the judiciary. Such institutions whose foundations are rooted in the realist state-centric approaches are not the best and sustainable given the circumstances in Zambia. They would not address the structural drivers of conflict discussed above as they are more prescriptive as opposed to being diagnostic. The outcomes of such an approach are always focused on cessation of violence which is *negative peace* as opposed to the *peace writ large, which is positive peace* (Galtung 1996).

Therefore, to achieve sustainable peace and consolidate social cohesion, this article proposes a Zambia National Peace Architecture (NPA) which identifies and integrates the

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country’s initiatives that contribute to peacebuilding, conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation mechanisms by various stakeholders into a cohesive whole, and to provide an environment in which Zambians enjoy sustained peace and unity, experience freedom and other benefits guaranteed under the Constitution. Such an architecture will clarify the institutional framework within which the stakeholders will coordinate peace-building mechanisms to create harmonised, integrated and cohesive approaches to prevent violent conflicts, sustain peace and social cohesion in Zambia. It will complement other existing policies and strategies in seeking to create essential conditions for successful economic development. Furthermore, the NPA would not only address a plethora of manifesting structural and dynamic causes of conflict but provide a pro-active and robust architecture and an early warning framework for timely responding to and managing conflict.

The National Peace Architecture (NPA): What it Is!

A National Peace Architecture (NPA) serves as the national pillar for peacebuilding, conflict prevention and transformation aimed at strengthening national cohesion (Kumar, 2012). The NPA, when fully operational, is functionally represented at national, provincial and district levels where structures are engaged in a collaborative manner with other key stakeholders in reconciliation and transformative dialogues that foster peace and national cohesion. NPAs are increasingly being implemented across many countries at the moment as a conflict prevention and social cohesion strategy, especially in Africa. They have proved effective instruments for stability as well as infrastructure for peace (Kumar and la Haye, 2011:14).

The Objectives the Zambian NPA.

The objective of the Zambian NPA would be to provide a national peace and social cohesion policy strategy developed around four key components:

- I. To develop sustainable capacities of the Government of Zambia to address structural factors contributing to conflict, and to promote long-term peacebuilding and social cohesion, both at the national and community level. This would operationally entail institutionalising peace-building and social cohesion mechanisms and procedures in the government; and strengthening conflict resolution capacity and mechanisms at the community level.
- II. To ensure a conflict sensitivity analysis to the government development policy, plans and programmes. This entails making social cohesion and conflict sensitivity are integral to the development process and a cornerstone of the Zambian Government. A national development plan anchored on a sound conflict sensitivity strategy would embrace the *New Ways of Working* by ensuring mainstreaming of the principles of such as inclusivity and *Leaving No One Behind* thereby strengthening social and national cohesion.
- III. Promoting Institutionalised, Conflict Prevention, Management and Transformation Mechanisms and Capacities. Operationally this entails enhancing pro-active, collaborated, institutionalised and multi-pronged peace-building mechanisms including;
 - a. Establishing national conflict early warning and early response system

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- b. Facilitated dialogues, confidence and trust building to maintain and build constructive partnerships
 - c. Regular conflict analysis at national and sub-national levels
 - d. Mediation and preventive diplomacy
 - e. Peace education - strengthen the institutionalisation of peace education in educational curricula as a social cohesion strategy.
 - f. A more effective electoral risk analysis and management framework in place
- IV. Promote greater participation and role of youth and women in the peacebuilding and social cohesion. This operationally entails putting gender equality at the heart of peace-building and social cohesion and to incorporate greater women’s participation in the peace-building and social cohesion agenda of Zambia.

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