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**A child soldier in Congo displays a grenade from his backpack. Various groups are pressing for more rigorous enforcement of regional treaties to control small arms.**

## African Solutions for Africa

BY AKWASI AIDOO

▶▶ A standard but cruel joke in Africa is that for every African civil war there are a hundred peace negotiations. In Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi, for example, peace negotiations have typically been as protracted and serial as the civil wars.

To help overcome obstacles to sustainable peace, the Ford Foundation two years ago set up the Special Initiative for Africa. It is dedicated to finding African solutions to three regional challenges: peace and conflict, citizenship and identity, and economic integration.

Over the past two years, the Special Initiative has convened more than 150 scholars, public intellectuals, social movement activists, public officials and funders from 30 African countries to develop continental strategies for addressing these challenges.

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As a result, about 50 African organizations and institutions are now working together to strengthen the enforcement of regional policies and treaties and to establish a place for historically marginalized voices in this work. The Special Initiative will document and disseminate successful African approaches to small arms control, peace negotiations, immigration barriers and regional trade.

Initial work focuses on peace negotiations. At the first of the Special Initiative's convenings in Maputo, Mozambique, Professor Horace Campbell, a noted Africa scholar, laid the blame for the ineffectiveness of negotiations on the way they are organized. "Because they regularly exclude those social groups with the highest stake in peace, namely women and youth, African peace negotiations are no more than opportunities for combatants to rearm and resume violent conflicts," he said. When negotiations are deprived of legitimacy, agreements don't hold.

This may be about to change. At the Liberia peace negotiations in Accra, Ghana, the difference has been remarkable: A grass-roots organization called Women in Peace-Building Network secured a place for itself at the table. WIPNET's goal, simply stated, is to ensure that peace agreements in Liberia and Ivory Coast reflect women's concerns. With funding from the Urgent Action Fund-Africa—an initiative grantee—WIPNET generated international media interest. Notably, WIPNET mobilized its members for "sit-ins" that kept the contending parties "talking till there's an enforceable agreement," says Betty Murungi of Urgent Action Fund-Africa. The result is the first ever peace agreement in Liberia that all stakeholders seem committed to enforcing.

The outcome is uncertain, for sustainable peace depends on a variety of factors. Even so, a new and positive trend is under way in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda and Kenya as women's groups mobilize. In all these cases, the critical factor, Murungi says, is that "the women are successfully crossing borders, sharing knowledge, developing common strategies, supporting each other and gaining rare media coverage." Such inter-African collaboration and synergy reflect the core strategy of the Special Initiative for Africa.

Beyond work on peace processes themselves, the initiative supports collaborative efforts to control the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, a major source of widespread violence and political instability. Although Africa is not a major arms producer, it possesses nearly one-quarter of the world's estimated 500 million illicit small arms and light weapons. In recent years, the Economic Community of West African States and the Southern Africa Development Community have each established a moratorium on such weapons. But much more needs to be done. The moratoriums are not well known to the public, lack national agencies to enforce them and have contradictory provisions. For

example, each moratorium defines light weapons differently.

In West, Southern and Eastern Africa, two of the Special Initiative's partner organizations, the South Africa-based SaferAfrica and the Ghana-based Foundation for Security and Development in Africa, are pressing national governments to enforce regional treaties to control small arms. According to Afi Yakubu, the director of FOSDA: "Our collaboration with SaferAfrica in South Africa has helped us to persuasively make the point that this is an African problem requiring shared African solutions." Their effort is paying off: The media in West, Eastern and Southern Africa have increased their coverage of the issue, and the African Union (which includes all African countries) is showing interest in this work.

In dealing with citizenship and identity, the Special Initiative focuses on how to remove the barriers to travel within the continent. "Africa is the most inaccessible place for Africans who move in search of work or are fleeing from armed conflict," says Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, director of the Pan-African Movement in Uganda. Even when migrants gain entry to another African country, they are often denied basic human rights.

The cases of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Sudan, Algeria and Ivory Coast are illustrative. Migrants and their descendants are subject to severely restrictive citizenship laws, polit-



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**A Sudanese refugee who has been resettled in Uganda displays his identification card.**

Economic integration, the third concern of the Special Initiative, has great potential for African development. Africa is marginalized in the global economy, with a meager 1.1 percent of global trade. There are also severe impediments to cross-border trade and investment within the continent. The obstacles include discriminatory trade tariffs and investment laws, prohibitive tax laws, poor communication and transportation infrastructures, exclusionary immigration practices and weak national currencies.

A leading grantee of the Special Initiative, the Third World Network-Africa, is

promote environmental sustainability and community development.

In addition, African governments are working to develop continental and sub-regional economic integration institutions. These include the planned pan-African investment and monetary banks of the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the Southern African Development Community and the East African Economic Community.

In this era of increasing globalization, Africa faces new challenges that cannot be met by solutions invented and imposed by people outside the region. The search for African solutions to African problems assumes a concrete and realistic meaning when viewed from the perspective of inter-African collaboration. As explained by a participant in a recent convening of the initiative, "it makes our work much easier to be able to point to successful approaches from within Africa itself, rather than what is required in an abstract sense."

At a recent workshop of the initiative in Ethiopia, a participant remarked: "The Special Initiative feels like something no funder had ever done before in Africa." That summarizes the project—supporting new ways for Africans to work together regionally, addressing challenges beyond the capacity of individual countries to overcome.

As the Special Initiative links diverse groups, organizations, and institutions across Africa, it is, in a strategic sense, making a forest out of the trees.

*For more information about the S.I.A.'s peace activities go to [www.peaceafrica.net](http://www.peaceafrica.net).* ■

**In an era of increasing globalization, Africa faces new challenges that cannot be met by solutions invented and imposed by people outside the region. The Special Initiative focuses on conflict resolution, citizenship and identity, and economic integration.**

ical exclusion and human rights violations. These can create conditions for protracted political instability and devastating civil wars. A coalition of organizations led by the Center for Policy Studies in South Africa, Justice Africa and the Development Policy Management Forum in Ethiopia is working to address this challenge. They are shaping and monitoring regional policies that secure democratic participation for citizens and migrants alike.

working with governments, intergovernmental agencies and civil society organizations across Africa to remove many of these obstacles. They would harmonize national customs policies while removing discriminatory tariffs. They would develop investment policies that encourage small and medium-sized enterprises across borders, and they advocate single regional currencies. They also work to ensure that trade and investment policies