

of external technical assistance and intervention, as a process to be managed by outside actors, but also directly involves the *domestic political process* of the African state. As a result, it is necessary to incorporate a societal perspective on internal conflict, such that effective mechanisms and approaches to conflict prevention and management are *built in* to the political process itself. This will "embed" the conflict actors in the very process of prevention and management. For international and regional organisations that are designed to deal primarily with inter-state conflict, this internal aspect is difficult to incorporate but it is necessary. It was noted in this regard that it remains difficult to handle the problem of state sovereignty when promoting the interaction of state and internal non-state actors.

Africa in the 1990s has seen a tremendous transformation in political systems towards democracy. This has entailed sweeping *institutional reforms* in many states, and this creates opportunities for conflict prevention initiatives to be built in to the reform process. In other words, conflict prevention should be made part and parcel of the new institutions that are evolving to support African democracy. As well, IFIs and NGOs which have identified democratic development as a policy priority should similarly look to embedding conflict prevention in their projects and programs. This means that in addition to the question of building a "critical mass" of support for democracy, the content of that support must also be considered in terms of its organisational design. Democratic development programs have tended to focus on issues related to interest representation and interest articulation, at the expense of *interest aggregation*. Yet it is interest aggregation that is most relevant for the promotion of consensus-building and inter-group cooperation in society. So a sharper focus is required on the institutional arrangements that will foster the aggregation of interests in a peaceful manner.

Some participants observed that while institutional reform is an important aspect of domestic conflict prevention, it requires a more fundamental agreement between groups in society on the validity of the *norms* which support the political process. If there is a divergence of positions on this normative framework for political interaction, institutions will not be effective in coping with conflict issues. The current situation in Africa is that norms are regularly invoked to *delegitimize* some political actors, particularly minorities and other non-state identity groups that seek the devolution of political power by the state. This delegitimation strategy often forces these groups to pursue mobilisation outside of the existing political process, which leads to an escalation of conflict. The end result is the *paralysis of the political process* due to this normative clash between the state and non-state actors, and this then acts as a root cause of violent internal war. It was