

*Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for African Climate Conflict Management: Utilising Local
Negotiation and Mediation Frameworks*

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
1.0 Introduction	3
2.0 Climate Change as a Driver of Conflicts in Africa	5
3.0 Utilising Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for African Climate Conflict Management ..	7
4.0 Conclusion	10

**Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for African Climate Conflict Management?:
Utilising Local Negotiation and Mediation Frameworks**

Kariuki Muigua*

Abstract

This paper examines how climate change conflicts in Africa can be effectively managed. The paper observes that Africa is highly vulnerable to climate change. It notes that the impacts of climate change are undermining Sustainable Development in Africa. In particular, the paper observes that climate change is driving and worsening conflicts all over Africa with negative impacts on peace, security, stability and development. Due to their adverse effects on people, communities and nations, the paper posits that effective African climate conflict management is a prerequisite for Sustainable Development. In order to achieve this goal, the paper discusses how Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) can be harnessed for African climate conflict management by utilising local negotiation and mediation frameworks.

1.0 Introduction

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges currently facing humanity. Due to its adverse effects on humanity and nature, climate change has been described as a real and present danger to the lives of billions of people today and to everyone on the planet in the foreseeable future¹. In particular, it has been observed that adverse climatic and weather events including heatwaves, wildfires, floods, sea-level rise, tropical storms, droughts and hurricanes are increasing in scale, frequency and intensity globally with severe impacts on people and planet². The impacts of climate change are causing dangerous and widespread disruption, depletion and degradation of nature while also affecting the lives, health, livelihoods and well-being of billions of people all over the world³. The United Nations *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*⁴ describes climate change

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¹ Grzybowski. A., & Hunnie. C., 'Mediating Peace with Climate Change' Available at <https://ecopeaceme.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/mediating-peace-with-climate-change.pdf> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

² World Health Organization., 'Climate Change' Available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health#:~:text=Key%20facts,diarrhoea%20and%20heat%20stress%20alone>. (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

³ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change., 'Climate change: a threat to human wellbeing and health of the planet. Taking action now can secure our future' Available at https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/press/IPCC_AR6_WGII_PressRelease-English.pdf (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

⁴ United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

*Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for African Climate Conflict Management: Utilising Local
Negotiation and Mediation Frameworks*

as one of the greatest challenges of our time whose adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve Sustainable Development⁵.

In addition to its direct impacts on people and planet, climate change is also fuelling conflicts all over the world. It has been observed that climate change acts as a threat multiplier that can cause and worsens conflicts especially in vulnerable regions⁶. For instance, climate change can increase human security issues such as food and water scarcity while also leading to (violent) conflict in climate-vulnerable regions and countries⁷. Climate change can therefore trigger or worsen conflicts due to its impacts including displacement of people, increased food insecurity and depletion and degradation of vital resources including water and arable land⁸. The United Nations observes that climate change is a threat multiplier, which exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and tensions, a situation that can trigger or worsen conflicts⁹. In particular, by intensifying competition for dwindling natural resources including land, water and food, and fuelling displacements and migration, climate change creates and worsens conditions that can lead to both violent and non-violent conflicts¹⁰.

Climate change conflicts are undesirable. For instance, environmental and climate change conflicts can trigger violence, insecurity and destruction, particularly in states with weak governance, high levels of corruption, and existing ethnic and political divisions¹¹. Climate change conflicts, especially those that are violent in nature, can affect peace, security and development including through loss of human life, loss of livelihoods, forced displacements and social tensions with disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations¹². Climate change conflicts therefore undermine peace, security and development while also hindering the attainment of climate goals at all levels¹³. Effective management of climate change conflicts is therefore necessary for

⁵ Ibid

⁶ International Institute for Sustainable Development., 'Climate change and conflict: Lessons from Community Conservancies in Northern Kenya' Available at https://www.iisd.org/system/files/publications/climate_change_conflict_kenya.pdf (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

⁷ Froese. R., & Janpeter. S, 'The Nexus of Climate Change, Land Use, and Conflicts' (2019)

⁸ United Nations Climate Change., 'Conflict and Climate' Available at <https://unfccc.int/news/conflict-and-climate> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

⁹ United Nations., 'Climate, Peace and Security: What we need to Know' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/peaceandsecurity/climate-peace-and-security-what-we-need-know> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Brown. O., & Keating. M., 'Addressing Natural Resource Conflicts: Working towards more Effective Resolution of National and Sub-National Resource Disputes' Available at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2015/06/addressing-natural-resource-conflicts-working-towards-more-effective-resolution-national> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

¹² United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs., 'The Implications of Climate Change for Mediation and Peace Processes' Available at <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/DPPAPracticeNote-TheImplicationsofClimateChangeforMediationandPeaceProcesses.pdf> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

¹³ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Climate Litigation More than Doubles in Five Years, now a Key Tool in Delivering Climate Justice' Available at <https://www.unep.org/news-and->

Sustainable Development. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) notes that as the global population continues to rise, the global demand for natural resources continues to grow, and the impacts of climate change intensify, the competition over natural resources is set to increase a situation that will lead to more environmental and climate change conflicts in the coming years¹⁴. Consequently, there is need to put in place appropriate strategies at the global, regional, national and local levels, in order to ensure sound climate conflict management for peace, security, development and prosperity.

This paper examines how climate change conflicts in Africa can be effectively managed. The paper observes that Africa is highly vulnerable to climate change. It notes that the impacts of climate change are undermining Sustainable Development in Africa. In particular, the paper observes that climate change is driving and worsening conflicts all over Africa with negative impacts on peace, security, stability and development. Due to their adverse effects on people, communities and nations, the paper posits that effective African climate conflict management is a prerequisite for Sustainable Development. In order to achieve this goal, the paper discusses how Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) can be harnessed for African climate conflict management by utilising local negotiation and mediation frameworks.

2.0 Climate Change as a Driver of Conflicts in Africa

Africa is disproportionately impacted by the global climate crisis. The United Nations points out that Africa is not a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions since the continent accounts for only 2–3 per cent of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions from energy and industrial sources¹⁵. However, despite Africa’s negligible contribution to climate change, the continent stands out disproportionately as the most vulnerable region in the world to the impacts of climate change¹⁶. Although Africa has contributed the least to global warming by having the lowest greenhouse gas emissions when compared to other regions, the continent faces exponential collateral damage due to climate change which poses risks to the continent’s economies, infrastructure investments, water and food systems, public health, agriculture, and livelihoods¹⁷.

[stories/pressrelease/climate-litigation-more-doubles-five-years-now-key-tool-delivering](#) (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

¹⁴ United Nations Environment Programme., ‘Environmental Cooperation and Peacebuilding.’ Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/fresh-water/disasters-and-climate-change/environment-security/environmental-cooperation-and#:~:text=International%20law%2C%20environment%20and%20conflict,and%20reliance%20on%20conflict%20resources> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

¹⁵ United Nations Climate Change., ‘Africa is particularly vulnerable to the expected impacts of global warming’ Available at https://unfccc.int/files/press/backgrounders/application/pdf/factsheet_africa.pdf (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

¹⁶ United Nations Environment Programme., ‘Responding to climate change’ Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/africa/regional-initiatives/responding-climate-change> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

¹⁷ African Development Bank Group., ‘Climate Change in Africa’ Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/cop25/climate-change-africa> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

*Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for African Climate Conflict Management: Utilising Local
Negotiation and Mediation Frameworks*

Climate change is a major threat to Sustainable Development in Africa. For instance, Africa is witnessing mounting climate change related weather events and patterns including rising temperatures, droughts and floods¹⁸. These events have adverse impacts on food security, water availability, energy, education, infrastructure and public health in Africa¹⁹. They also fuel humanitarian crises including displacement of populations and the growth of climate refugees threatening peace, security and stability in Africa²⁰. The effects of climate change undermine the quest for Sustainable Development in Africa with disproportionate impacts on the continent's vulnerable populations including women and girls, the youth and indigenous and local communities²¹. In addition to its impacts on human health, livelihoods and development, it has been observed that climate change also has adverse environmental impacts in Africa since it causes desertification, biodiversity loss and changes in natural ecosystems²².

Climate change is also increasingly driving and worsening conflicts all over Africa. It has been observed that in Africa and the Global South where the majority of people and communities depend on natural resources including land, water and forests for their livelihoods, the impacts of climate change on these vital resources can cause and worsen conflicts²³. For example, in such contexts, sudden events including flooding or prolonged droughts reduce the availability of arable land, water, fuel, food and fish stocks leading to competition and conflict over these resources²⁴. In particular, in the African context, the adverse impacts of climate change including drought have resulted in competition over dwindling resources such as water and grazing land therefore leading to conflicts and violence²⁵. In addition, it has been observed that the consequences of climate change such as land degradation, droughts, water scarcity, floods, storms and famines have led to an increase in environmental migration in Africa, a situation which exposes vulnerable populations to violence and conflicts with their hosts²⁶.

Africa is therefore highly vulnerable to climate-induced conflicts. In particular, climate change is fuelling the scarcity of vital natural resources including water, pasture, food, and arable land, triggering competition and conflicts over these resources all over the continent²⁷. Since most African economies and the livelihoods of many individuals and communities in the continent are

¹⁸ United Nations Climate Change., 'Africa is particularly vulnerable to the expected impacts of global warming' Op Cit

¹⁹ World Meteorological Organization., 'Africa faces disproportionate burden from climate change and adaptation costs' Available at <https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/africa-faces-disproportionate-burden-from-climate-change-and-adaptation-costs> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ United Nations Climate Change., 'Africa is particularly vulnerable to the expected impacts of global warming' Op Cit

²² Ibid

²³ Climate Change and Conflict., Available at <https://www.accord.org.za/publication/climate-change-conflict/> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Environmental Conflicts: Key Issues and Management Implications., Available at <https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/environmental-conflicts/> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ United Nations., 'In Africa's Sahel, conflict and climate change force millions from their homes' Available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166076> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

heavily reliant on natural resources, the impacts of climate change on natural resources in Africa creates conditions that can trigger and worsen conflicts²⁸. The consequences of climate change in Africa including recurrent droughts, irregular rainfall, severe floods, water scarcity and intensified desertification are disrupting livelihoods, fuelling migration, causing food and water shortages and internal displacement thus leading to inter-communal violence and conflicts²⁹. In addition, climate action in areas such as renewable energy, carbon markets, green industrialization and sustainable transport has become a source of disputes and conflicts in Africa with individuals, interest groups and communities bringing claims against states and private entities on issues such as human rights violations, non-compliance with global and nations climate goals and commitments, and false and misleading claims against organizations³⁰.

Climate change induced conflicts are a major threat to Africa's pursuit of Sustainable Development. It has been observed that if left unchecked, environmental and climate change conflicts in Africa will worsen food insecurity, water shortages, migration, displacement of vulnerable populations and poverty undermining peace, stability and development in the continent³¹. It is therefore necessary to strengthen African climate conflict management in order to effectively and appropriately address climate change conflicts for peace, security, stability and development in Africa.

3.0 Utilising Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for African Climate Conflict Management

With Africa facing extreme vulnerability to climate change, climate-induced conflicts in the continent are inevitable. It has been observed that the impacts of climate change including forced migration, depletion of natural resources, food insecurity and economic disruptions, have the potential to exacerbate existing conflicts and introduce new vulnerabilities in Africa³². Due to their impacts on peace, security and development, effective management of climate change conflicts in Africa is a prerequisite for Sustainable Development. It has been observed that Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes including negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration provide tools and solutions that can ensure sound environmental and climate conflict management both globally and in Africa³³. In general, ADR mechanisms provide an accessible, flexible, expeditious, cost-effective, and responsive approach towards managing environmental

²⁸ Climate induced conflicts: Sources of insecurity in Africa., Available at <https://amaniafrica-et.org/insights-on-the-psc-session-on-climate-induced-conflicts-sources-of-insecurity-in-africa/#:~:text=The%20changing%20rainfall%20patterns%20and,with%20better%20availability%20of%20resources>. (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ A new wave of African climate change disputes on the horizon., Available at <https://www.whitecase.com/insight-our-thinking/africa-focus-winter-2023-climate-change#:~:text=Three%20categories%20of%20climate%20change,perpetrated%20in%20the%20Niger%20Delta>. (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

³¹ United Nations., 'In Africa's Sahel, conflict and climate change force millions from their homes' Op Cit

³² Climate Change: Challenges to Peace and Security in Africa., Available at <https://amaniafrica-et.org/climate-change-challenges-to-peace-and-security-in-africa/> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

³³ Grad. F.P., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution in Environmental Law.' *Columbia Journal of Environmental Law* Volume: 14, Issue 1

*Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for African Climate Conflict Management: Utilising Local
Negotiation and Mediation Frameworks*

and climate change conflicts towards peace, justice and development³⁴. ADR processes such as mediation, negotiation and conciliation can foster collaboration, cooperation and participation in environmental governance, decision making processes and conflict management for environmental justice³⁵.

In particular, negotiation and mediation provide a viable platform for appropriate climate conflict management both globally and in Africa. It has been observed that negotiation provides an effective and appropriate tool that can strengthen climate conflict management at the local, national, regional and global levels³⁶. For example, at the local and national levels, negotiation can enable communities to agree on issues such as access and use of scarce natural resources in the midst of mounting climate impacts³⁷. In addition, at the regional and global levels, negotiation between and among nations is key towards addressing the causes and drivers of climate change conflicts including disagreements of transboundary natural resources, and climate-induced mobility³⁸.

Mediation is also a suitable approach in ensuring appropriate climate conflict management. In general, mediation is an effective and appropriate process in managing environmental conflicts since it encourages collaboration, consensus building and the participation of all stakeholders towards peaceful, sustainable and durable outcomes³⁹. Through mediation, it is possible to address deep-seated and underlying issues in environmental conflicts therefore encouraging trust, reconciliation, harmony and peace among various stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, governments and investors⁴⁰. It has been observed that mediation provides several advantages including neutrality, flexibility, confidentiality and collaboration thus ensuring an effective approach towards managing environmental conflicts, which are increasingly driven by resource scarcity and climate change⁴¹. In particular, in the context of climate conflict management, mediation can enhance collaboration by fostering the engagement of local parties and communities, while offering options for integrating their voices and expertise in the climate

³⁴ Muigua. K., 'Attaining Environmental Justice through Alternative Dispute Resolution.' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Attaining-Environmental-Justice-through-Alternative-Dispute-Resolution.pdf> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

³⁵ Environmental Law Institute., 'A Community Guide to Using Alternative Dispute Resolution to Secure Environmental Justice' Available at <https://www.eli.org/environmental-governance/community-guideusing-alternative-dispute-resolution-secure-1> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

³⁶ Climate change, conflict and fragility: Understanding the linkages, shaping effective responses., Available at <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/climate-change-conflict-and-fragility/#:~:text=These%20concerns%2C%20however%2C%20are%20not,all%20but%20a%20privileged%20few> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Muigua. K., 'Attaining Environmental Justice through Alternative Dispute Resolution.' Op Cit

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Mediation as a Tool for Resolving Environmental Disputes: An Evaluation., Available at <https://i-adrnigeria.org/mediation-as-a-tool-for-resolving-environmental-disputes-an-evaluation/#:~:text=This%20article%20explores%20the%20concept,negotiations%20can%20sometimes%20hinder%20progress>. (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

*Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for African Climate Conflict Management: Utilising Local
Negotiation and Mediation Frameworks*

change discourse⁴². It has been observed that by focusing on collaboration and cooperation, mediation enables the integration of women and girls, youth and marginalized groups, who face particular climate risks and indigenous peoples and local communities, whose expertise can help identify key issues, priorities, and solutions in climate change conflicts⁴³. In addition, mediation can enhance climate diplomacy and the management of climate change conflicts globally by enabling diplomats from different countries to negotiate and come up with common positions and solutions on climate change⁴⁴. In particular, in climate change conflicts involving two states, mediation is key in promoting mutual cooperation and collaboration among the nations where the party states are directly involved in resolving the issues, through their representatives or diplomats negotiating for the benefits of the public at large⁴⁵. Further, in transboundary climate change conflicts, the transnational applicability of international mediation makes it ideal in promoting diplomacy across borders and initiating cooperation and collaboration towards appropriate climate conflict management for international peace and security⁴⁶.

It is therefore necessary to embrace ADR techniques for appropriate African climate conflict management. In particular, utilising local negotiation and mediation frameworks provides an effective, appropriate and responsive approach towards ensuring that climate change-induced conflicts are well managed in Africa for peace, security and development. For instance, local negotiation and mediation frameworks ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of all stakeholders in mediation processes including vulnerable groups such as women, the youth and indigenous and local communities towards addressing the root causes of climate change conflicts and affording parties an opportunity to sustain and improve their relationships⁴⁷. Local negotiation and mediation frameworks can also ensure the inclusion of fundamental African values and philosophies including peace, collaboration, harmony and *Ubuntu* in climate conflict management for sustainable, durable and culturally-appropriate responses⁴⁸. In particular, it has been observed that by incorporating African philosophies and values such as *Ubuntu* in environmental negotiation and mediation, it is possible to promote environmental justice by providing a platform for effective management of environmental conflicts towards peace, harmony and social cohesion while prioritizing the needs of both humanity and nature due to their interconnectedness⁴⁹. It is therefore necessary to utilise local negotiation and mediation frameworks in order to ensure the effective and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders

⁴² United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs., 'The Implications of Climate Change for Mediation and Peace Processes' Op Cit

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Thailand Arbitration Center., 'Resolving Climate Conflicts with Mediation: Redesigning Earth's Destiny' Available at <https://thac.or.th/conflicts-with-mediation/> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Girinarayanan. I., 'Can Climate Change Disputes be Resolved through Mediation?' Available at <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/can-climate-change-disputes-be-resolved-through-mediation> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

⁴⁷ Muigua. K., 'Managing Natural Resource Conflicts in Kenya through Negotiation and Mediation.' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Managing-Natural-Resource-Conflicts-in-Kenya-through-Negotiation-and-Mediation.pdf> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

⁴⁸ Mliswa. A., 'Ubuntu: Africa's Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Framework?' Available at <https://africasocialwork.net/ubuntu-africas-esg-framework/> (Accessed on 04/10/2026)

⁴⁹ Ibid

*Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for African Climate Conflict Management: Utilising Local
Negotiation and Mediation Frameworks*

including women and girls, the youth, and indigenous and local communities while also infusing African values and philosophies such as *Ubuntu* in environmental and climate conflict management.

4.0 Conclusion

With climate change fuelling and worsening conflicts all over Africa, effective climate conflict management is a key continental priority for Sustainable Development. In particular, ADR processes provide a viable platform for sound and effective African climate conflict management for peace, security, stability and development⁵⁰. It is therefore necessary to embrace ADR towards appropriate African climate conflict management for Sustainable Development. In particular, by utilising local negotiation and mediation frameworks, it is possible to ensure appropriate African climate conflict management through the involvement of all stakeholders including women and girls, the youth, and indigenous and local communities in managing climate change-induced conflicts while also inculcating African values and philosophies such as *Ubuntu*, peace, harmony and social cohesion in climate conflict management. Utilising local negotiation and mediation frameworks is therefore a practical and effective approach towards harnessing ADR for African climate conflict management for peace, security, stability and development.

⁵⁰ Muigua. K., 'Attaining Environmental Justice through Alternative Dispute Resolution.' Op Cit

*Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for African Climate Conflict Management: Utilising Local
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Negotiation and Mediation Frameworks*

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*Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) for African Climate Conflict Management: Utilising Local
Negotiation and Mediation Frameworks*

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