

Effective Conflict Resolution through Mediation in Africa: Radiating Peace, Harmony, Ubuntu and Transformation

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**Effective Conflict Resolution through Mediation in Africa: Radiating Peace,
Harmony, Ubuntu and Transformation**

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Abstract

This paper discusses how mediation can be appropriately harnessed for effective conflict resolution in Africa. It observes that mediation has been practiced in Africa since antiquity. The paper points out that mediation is well anchored in the culture and customs of the people of Africa and provides valuable solutions towards sound conflict resolution in the continent for peace and Sustainable Development. Despite its efficacy, the paper notes that mediation faces several challenges in Africa undermining effective management of conflicts. Consequently, the discussion argues that there is need to revamp mediation towards effective conflict resolution in Africa. The paper examines how peace, harmony, Ubuntu and transformation can be infused in mediation towards effective conflict resolution in Africa for Sustainable Development.

1.0 Introduction

Africa is classified as a continent that is highly vulnerable to conflicts. For many decades, Africa has been highly susceptible to intra and inter- state wars and conflicts¹. There have been frequent conflicts across the continent which are fueled by various factors including disputes over natural resources, fight for political control, poverty, negative ethnicity,

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¹ Olaosebikan. A., 'Conflicts in Africa: Meaning, Causes, Impact and Solution.' *African Research Review.*, Volume 4, No. 4 (2010)

religion, environmental causes, and external influence, among others². Consequently, it has been argued that the history of Africa as a continent is replete with conflict³.

The prevalence of conflicts in Africa undermines peace, security and Sustainable Development. It has been observed that conflicts have had adverse impacts on every aspect and corner of the African family, community and nation-state, with economic, cultural, political, social, and environmental costs⁴. The adverse impacts of conflicts and wars in Africa include loss of human life, destruction of critical infrastructure, loss of livelihoods, environmental damage, and humanitarian crises including the growth of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)⁵. These impacts have been a major cause of underdevelopment in Africa for many years. According to the United Nations, conflicts and wars have worsened instability, human rights abuses and humanitarian crises in Africa⁶. It has been observed that across the world, but notably in Africa, instability and conflict continue to generate and exacerbate poverty and institutional fragility, which in turn undermines development and decrease resilience and the prospects for peace⁷.

In light of the foregoing, effective conflict resolution is vital towards peace and Sustainable Development in Africa. The United Nations *2030 Agenda for Sustainable*

² Muigua. K., 'Towards Effective Peacebuilding and Conflict Management in Kenya.' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Towards-Peacebuilding-and-Conflict-Management-in-Kenya.docx-Kariuki-Muigua-MAY-2021x.pdf> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

³ Olaosebikan. A., 'Conflicts in Africa: Meaning, Causes, Impact and Solution.' Op Cit

⁴ Uwazie. E., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution and Peace-building in Africa.' Available at <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/resources/pdfs/978-1-4438-5707-9-sample.pdf> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

⁵ Ibid

⁶ United Nations., 'UN-African Union Cooperation a Must, As Landscape of Conflict Shifts' Available at <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/october-2023/un-african-union-cooperation-must-landscape-conflict-shifts-0> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

⁷ United Nations., 'Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa' Available at https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org.osaa/files/docs/2109875_osaa_sg_report_web_new.pdf (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

*Development*⁸ acknowledges that there can be no Sustainable Development without peace and no peace without Sustainable Development. However, due to the prevalence of conflicts in Africa, peace has become more challenging to sustain and protracted and recurring conflict more difficult to prevent or resolve, often because their underlying causes are not well understood and addressed⁹. Consequently, there is need for appropriate conflict resolution strategies in Africa in order foster peace and Sustainable Development.

This paper discusses how mediation can be appropriately harnessed for effective conflict resolution in Africa. It observes that mediation has been practiced in Africa since antiquity. The paper points out that mediation is well anchored in the culture and customs of the people of Africa and provides valuable solutions towards sound conflict resolution in the continent for peace and Sustainable Development. Despite its efficacy, the paper notes that mediation faces several challenges in Africa undermining effective management of conflicts. Consequently, the discussion argues that there is need to revamp mediation towards effective conflict resolution in Africa. The paper examines how peace, harmony, *Ubuntu* and transformation can be infused in mediation towards effective conflict resolution in Africa for Sustainable Development.

2.0 Mediation and Conflict Resolution in Africa: Promises and Pitfalls

Mediation is a process of conflict management, wherein a neutral third party known as a mediator intervenes to assist the parties in negotiating jointly acceptable resolution of issues in conflict¹⁰. Mediation has also been defined as a form of dispute resolution in which the parties meet and discuss issues in dispute and try to find acceptable solutions

⁸ 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 17/03/2026)

⁹ United Nations., 'Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa.' Op Cit

¹⁰ What is Mediation?., Available at <https://www.commerce.gov/cr/reports-and-resources/eo-mediation-guide/what-mediation> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

with the help of a mediator¹¹. In addition, mediation can also be described as a process of conflict management where conflicting parties gather to seek solutions to the conflict, with the assistance of a third party who facilitates discussions and the flow of information, thus aiding in the process of reaching an agreement¹². It is a non-adversarial and collaborative process through which an impartial third party, known as a mediator, helps parties in a dispute reach a resolution through interest-based negotiations¹³.

From the foregoing definitions, it can be deduced that mediation is negotiation facilitated by a neutral and trusted third party. It has been correctly observed that mediation is usually a continuation of the negotiation process since it arises where parties to a conflict have attempted negotiations, but have reached a deadlock¹⁴. As a result, parties involve a third party known as a mediator to assist them continue with the negotiations and ultimately break the deadlock¹⁵. It has been observed that a mediator is neutral and impartial and should not have preconceived bias on how the conflict should be resolved¹⁶. Therefore, a mediator does not impose a solution upon the parties but rather helps them to find common ground and understand each other's perspectives, positions and interests¹⁷. It has been observed that a mediator facilitates communication, promotes understanding, focuses the parties on their interests, and uses creative problem solving to enable them to reach their own agreement¹⁸.

¹¹ What is Mediation?., Available at <https://www.eib.org/en/readonline-publications/what-is-mediation> (Accessed on 17/06/2026)

¹² Muigua. K., 'Resolving Conflicts through Mediation in Kenya.' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2nd Edition., 2017

¹³ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Natural Resources and Conflict: A Guide for Mediation Practitioners' Available at https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/NRCMediation_UNDPAUNEP2015_0.pdf (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

¹⁴ Bercovitch. J., 'Mediation Success or Failure: A Search for the Elusive Criteria.' *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 7, p 289

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ What is Mediation?., Op Cit

¹⁷ European Investment Bank., 'What is Mediation?' Available at <https://www.eib.org/en/readonline-publications/what-is-mediation> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

¹⁸ Bercovitch. J., 'Mediation Success or Failure: A Search for the Elusive Criteria.' Op Cit

Harnessing mediation is key towards effective conflict resolution. For example, it has been observed that mediation provides several advantages including informality, flexibility, efficiency, confidentiality, party autonomy and the ability to promote expeditious and cost-effective management of conflicts making it an appropriate process in dispute resolution¹⁹. In addition, mediation also guarantees confidentiality, neutrality and impartiality in conflict resolution²⁰. Further, due to its focus on collaboration, mediation can promote sustainable and long-lasting outcomes that adequately address the root causes of conflicts and repair and even strengthen relationships²¹. According to the United Nations, the premise of mediation is that in the right environment, parties to a conflict can improve their relationships and move towards cooperation²².

Embracing mediation in Africa is therefore vital in quest towards effective conflict resolution for peace and Sustainable Development. It has been observed that mediation in Africa trace back to the very origin of mankind²³. Communities in Africa have utilised informal processes including mediation, negotiation, arbitration and conciliation in conflict resolution since time immemorial²⁴. In particular, it has been observed that mediation is deeply rooted in the culture and customs of the people of Africa due to its focus on reconciliation, peace and harmony²⁵. It has been argued that collectivistic cultures such as those found in Africa prefer conflict management strategies that are

¹⁹ Muigua. K., 'Resolving Conflicts through Mediation in Kenya.' Op Cit

²⁰ Amoh. G., 'Mediation-The Preferred Alternative for Conflict Resolution' Available at <https://www.gdrc.org/u-gov/conflict-amoh.html> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

²¹ JAMS ADR., 'Mediation Defined: What is Mediation?' Available at <https://www.jamsadr.com/mediation-defined/> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

²² United Nations., 'Guidance for Effective Mediation' Available at https://unrcca.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/dpa_msu_guidance_english_web.pdf (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

²³ Laibuta. K., 'Contending with Multiple Legal Orders for Wholesome Dispute Resolution' Available at <https://lc-adr.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ADR-IN-AFRICA-2.pdf> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ The Influence Of Culture On Mediation In The African Context., Available at <https://worldmediation.org/the-influence-of-culture-on-mediation-in-the-african-context/> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

harmony-inducing and therefore embrace non-adversarial techniques including mediation towards effective conflict resolution²⁶. Consequently, conflict management in African societies has for many centuries taken the form of informal negotiation, mediation, reconciliation and arbitration among other techniques²⁷. It has been observed that mediation and other informal techniques fit well within the concepts of justice in Africa and its core values of peace, truth, harmony and reconciliation²⁸.

Due to the foregoing attributes and advantages, mediation provides a viable and appropriate forum for effective conflict resolution in Africa. The United Nations observes that one of the underlying reasons for the high incidence of conflicts and wars in Africa is that their underlying causes are not well understood or addressed²⁹. In most instances, conflict management approaches and peace strategies in Africa only cover proximate causes and rarely address the deep-rooted factors that cause or sustain conflict³⁰. Consequently, it has been argued that mediation is an effective process that can address the root causes of conflict resulting in mutually satisfying and long lasting outcomes thus creating a suitable environment for peace by eliminating the likelihood of conflicts reemerging in future³¹. This is particularly relevant in the context of natural-resource based conflicts where sustainable and long-lasting outcomes are desirable since the shared benefits of these resources often cross societal, communal, and national boundaries³². Further, mediation is vital in addressing the root causes of political conflicts

²⁶ Kaushal. R., & Kwantes. C., 'The Role of Culture and Personality in Choice of Conflict Management Strategy.' *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 30 (2006) 579-603

²⁷ Kariuki. F., 'Conflict Resolution by Elders in Africa: Successes, Challenges and Opportunities.' Available at <http://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Conflict-Resolution-by-Elders-successes-challenges-and-opportunities-1.pdf> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

²⁸ Uwazie. E., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution in Africa: Preventing Conflict and Enhancing Stability.' *Africa Security Brief*, No. 16 of 2011

²⁹ United Nations., 'Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa.' Op Cit

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Muigua. K., 'Resolving Conflicts through Mediation in Kenya.' Op Cit

³² United Nations Environment Programme., 'Natural Resources and Conflict: A Guide for Mediation Practitioners' Op Cit

in Africa by supporting national dialogue and reconciliation efforts among warring parties³³.

Africa therefore has an opportunity to utilise mediation towards effective conflict resolution for peace and Sustainable Development. However, it has been observed that failure to effectively integrate mediation in peacebuilding efforts in Africa undermines the sustainability and durability of peace agreements, a situation that leads to reoccurrence of conflicts and wars in the continent³⁴. Further, it has been observed that the exclusion of key stakeholders including women and community leaders hinders effective conflict resolution through mediation in Africa³⁵. Women and community leaders including elders are integral to African societies and hold unique perspectives that can strengthen mediation efforts³⁶. Ensuring inclusion and justice is therefore necessary for effective conflict resolution through mediation in Africa.

In addition, failure to respect and uphold African cultural norms also undermines the effectiveness of mediation processes in Africa³⁷. It has been correctly noted that conflict resolution is largely influenced by culture³⁸. For instance, culture affect the ways we name, frame, blame, and attempt to tame conflicts³⁹. In the African context, conflict resolution focuses on creating consensus, facilitating reconciliation, fostering peace, harmony and cohesion and giving prominence to communal needs over individual needs in line with the African philosophy of *Ubuntu/Utu*⁴⁰. Respecting African cultural norms

³³ Mediation in African Internal Conflicts., Available at <https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2024-10/Rapport%20APSACO%202024vf.pdf> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

³⁴ United Nations., 'Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa.' Op Cit

³⁵ Mediation in African Internal Conflicts., Op Cit

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ LeBaron. M., 'Culture and Conflict.' Available at https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/culture_conflict (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Muigua. K., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution and Access to Justice in Kenya.' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2015

including the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* is therefore key towards effective conflict resolution through mediation in Africa.

3.0 Harnessing Mediation for Effective Conflict Resolution in Africa

The prevalence of conflicts in Africa is a major impediment to Sustainable Development. Consequently, there is need to put in place appropriate conflict management strategies in order to avoid and mitigate the human, economic, social, and environmental cost of conflict in Africa for Sustainable Development. Harnessing mediation is vital towards effective conflict resolution in Africa. However, in order to achieve this ideal, there is need to infuse peace in mediation processes. Mediation has been identified as an appropriate process in building and sustaining peace by addressing the root causes of conflicts⁴¹. It usually results in mutually satisfying and long-lasting outcomes therefore creating a suitable environment for peace by eliminating the likelihood of conflicts reemerging in future⁴². Consequently, it has been argued that peace and mediation are intrinsically linked, forming powerful synergies for effective conflict resolution towards building stable and prosperous societies⁴³. Peace has been identified as a key aspiration in the pursuit of Sustainable Development with mediation providing a pathway towards achieving it⁴⁴. Integrating mediation in peacebuilding efforts in Africa is therefore key towards effective conflict resolution. Further, it has been argued that promoting inclusive mediation processes that ensure meaningful involvement for key stakeholders including women and community leaders in peace processes can lead to more durable and sustainable outcomes⁴⁵.

⁴¹ Muigua. K., 'Resolving Conflicts through Mediation in Kenya.' Op Cit

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Peace and Mediation: Building a More Stable World., Available at <https://africa.dailynewsegypt.com/peace-and-mediation-building-a-more-stable-world/> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Agbajobi. D., 'The Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding' Available at <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/the-role-of-women-in-conflict-resolution-and-peacebuilding/> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

In addition, it is imperative to ensure that mediation upholds African cultural values including through radiating harmony and *Ubuntu*. It has been observed that in order for mediation to resonate effectively with the people of Africa, it needs to adhere to the spirit of conflict management practiced by communities in the continent⁴⁶. In particular, the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* guides conflict management emphasizing harmony, reconciliation, forgiveness and peaceful co-existence⁴⁷. It has been argued that in the context of conflict management, *Ubuntu* deters vengeance, confrontation and retribution and emphasises compassion, humaneness, harmony and reconciliation⁴⁸. *Ubuntu* is part and parcel of conflict management in the African cultural context since it emphasises restorative justice (harmony in the community), rather than punitive justice⁴⁹. Upholding harmony and *Ubuntu* in mediation is therefore necessary towards respecting African cultural norms for effective conflict resolution.

In addition, it is necessary to transform the landscape of mediation in Africa for effective conflict resolution. For instance, it has been observed legitimizing mediation through appropriate legal, institutional and policy frameworks, and building the capacity of mediators including community leaders can ensure a robust and vibrant mediation landscape in Africa for effective conflict resolution⁵⁰. Transforming the landscape of mediation in Africa is therefore paramount towards effective conflict resolution.

⁴⁶ Mediation in African Internal Conflicts., Op Cit

⁴⁷ Muigua. K., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution and Access to Justice in Kenya.' Op Cit

⁴⁸ Mugumbate. J., & Nyanguru. A., 'Exploring African Philosophy: The Value of Ubuntu in Social Work.' Available at <https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4272&context=sspapers&httpsredir=1&referer#::~:txt=Ubuntu%20can%20best%20be%20described,ngumuntu%20ngabantu%20in%20Zulu%20language> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

⁴⁹ Van Norren. D., 'African Ubuntu and Sustainable Development Goals: seeking human mutual relations and service in development' Available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2022.2109458#abstract> (Accessed on 17/03/2026)

⁵⁰ Price. C., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution in Africa: Is ADR the Bridge Between Traditional and Modern Dispute Resolution?.' *Pepperdine Dispute Resolution Law Journal*, Volume 18, Issue 3

4.0 Conclusion

Mediation is an appropriate process for conflict resolution in Africa. Mediation has been practiced in Africa since antiquity and is well anchored in the culture, customs and practices of the people of Africa⁵¹. With Africa being characterized by conflicts and wars that undermine Sustainable Development, embracing mediation is necessary towards effective conflict resolution for peace, stability and development⁵². It is therefore necessary to foster peace, embrace African cultural values of harmony and *Ubuntu* and transform the landscape of mediation in Africa for effective conflict resolution towards Sustainable Development.

⁵¹ Muigua. K., 'Resolving Conflicts through Mediation in Kenya.' Op Cit

⁵² United Nations., 'Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa.' Op Cit

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