

Peace Building and Restorative Justice for Africa: Including Women in the Processes for Gender Equality and Sustainability

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Abstract

This paper discusses how effective peace building can be achieved in Africa for Sustainable Development. The paper notes that Africa is highly susceptible to conflicts, wars and insecurity which undermine peace and development. Consequently, the paper posits that peace building is necessary in order to promote restorative justice, reconciliation and harmony in Africa towards tackling the root causes of conflicts and promoting long term development and sustainability. In particular, the paper observes that women are important agents in the quest towards peace building and restorative justice in Africa. The paper suggest how women can be actively and meaningfully involved in peace building efforts in Africa towards restorative justice, gender equality, development and sustainability.

1.0 Introduction

Building and sustaining peace is a prerequisite for Sustainable Development. For example, it has been correctly observed that the advancement of human rights, social justice, and Sustainable development are all dependent on the pursuit of peace¹. The United Nations points out that without peace, societies are often plagued by conflict, violence, and instability, which can hinder progress and result in the loss of lives and resources². Peace is therefore necessary for sustainability since nations and societies that are plagued with violence, conflicts, wars and insecurity often suffer from high levels of poverty and underdevelopment³. Absence of peace undermines sustainability on every

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¹ Mustafa. G., & Jamshed. U., 'Peace: A Conceptual Understanding' Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370062968_Peace_A_Conceptual_Understanding (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

² United Nations., 'Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions' Available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/> (01/09/2026)

³ United Nations Development Programme., 'Sustainable Peace for Sustainable Development - A Global Challenge that Calls for Collective Action.' Available at [https://www.undp.org/rwanda/blog/sustainable-peace-sustainable-development-global-challenge-calls-collective-action#:~:text=The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20\(SDGs\)%2C%20agreed%20to%20by%20all,for%20peace%20and%20strong%20institutions](https://www.undp.org/rwanda/blog/sustainable-peace-sustainable-development-global-challenge-calls-collective-action#:~:text=The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20(SDGs)%2C%20agreed%20to%20by%20all,for%20peace%20and%20strong%20institutions) (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

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front since conflicts, wars and insecurity disrupt economic activities, fuel environmental destruction and degradation, and lead to social instability⁴.

Promoting peace is a global priority due to the prevalence of conflicts, wars and insecurity all over the world. Wars, conflicts and insecurity lead to instability and result in significant setbacks or even reverse decades of progress in vital areas such as economic development, public health, education, and food security⁵. Ongoing global, regional and local conflicts are displacing millions of people, affecting livelihoods, disrupting food, energy and water systems, and affecting investments in vital sectors including education, healthcare and climate action⁶. Consequently, peace building is a priority in the global pursuit for Sustainable Development. At its core, peace building involves supporting nations and societies in or at the risk of conflict to prevent or end violence⁷. It also involves creating conditions that can lead to peaceful co-existence and social change by addressing the root causes of conflicts⁸.

Peace building is therefore key towards creating and maintaining conditions needed for sustainable and durable peace towards development. Through peace building, it is possible to establish the necessary conditions for positive and sustainable peace by addressing the deep rooted structural causes of conflicts and wars in a comprehensive and inclusive manner⁹. In particular, peace building emphasizes reconciliation, restorative justice, political, social and economic transformation in order to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts towards Sustainable Development¹⁰. Peace building is at the heart of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*¹¹ which acknowledges that there can be no Sustainable Development without peace and no peace without Sustainable

⁴ Peace and sustainability – Two sides of the same coin., Available at <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/peace-and-sustainability-two-sides-same-coin> (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

⁵ Peace and Conflict., Available at <https://www.mercycorps.org/what-we-do/peace-conflict> (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

⁶ Peace and sustainability – Two sides of the same coin., Op Cit

⁷ What is peacebuilding?., Available at <https://www.international-alert.org/about/what-is-peacebuilding/> (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Peace Building Initiative., 'Introduction to Peacebuilding' Available at <http://www.peacebuildinginitiative.org/index34ac.html> (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ 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 01/09/2026)

Development¹². In particular, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 16 seeks to build capacity at all levels in order to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for Sustainable Development¹³.

This paper discusses how effective peace building can be achieved in Africa for Sustainable Development. The paper notes that Africa is highly susceptible to conflicts, wars and insecurity which undermine peace and development. Consequently, the paper posits that peace building is necessary in order to promote restorative justice, reconciliation and harmony in Africa towards tackling the root causes of conflicts and promoting long term development and sustainability. In particular, the paper observes that women are important agents in the quest towards peace building and restorative justice in Africa. The paper suggest how women can be actively and meaningfully involved in peace building efforts in Africa towards restorative justice, gender equality, development and sustainability.

2.0 The Need for Effective Peace Building in Africa

Peace building has been identified as an important agenda for Africa since it is a necessary tool to re-establish and strengthen peace, security and stability and initiate the process of nation-building especially in conflict-ridden and war ravaged countries in the continent¹⁴. Due to the mutually reinforcing relationship between peace and development, peace building in Africa is a fundamental principle and ideal towards unlocking Sustainable Development in a continent that has been characterized by wars and conflicts for many decades¹⁵. Effective peace building is necessary towards prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa for development¹⁶. The African Union (AU) observes that through peace building, it is possible to facilitate timely and efficient responses to conflict and crisis situations in Africa towards promoting peace, security and stability¹⁷.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Moses. U.U., 'Peace Building in Africa' Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373135789_Peace_Building_in_Africa (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

¹⁵ United Nations Development Programme., 'African Peace Processes: Lessons Learned' Available at <https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/african-peace-processes-lessons-learned> (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

¹⁶ African Union., 'The Peace & Security Council' Available at <https://au.int/en/psc> (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

¹⁷ Ibid

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For many decades, Africa has witnessed inter and intra-state wars and conflicts that have undermined socio-economic growth and set the continent back in all development indices¹⁸. There have been frequent wars and conflicts across Africa which are fueled and worsened by various factors, including but not limited to disputes over access, use and management of natural resources, fight for political control, poverty, negative ethnicity, religious tensions, environmental causes, and external influence¹⁹. It has been observed that since their independence, almost all African countries have experienced some form of conflict²⁰. This situation has become worse in the recent past with Africa experiencing an escalation of violent conflict and humanitarian crises²¹. Conflicts and wars in Africa are now more protracted, more fragmented, and deeply embedded in social, political, and economic systems²².

The prevalence of wars and conflicts in Africa undermines the pursuit of Sustainable Development. The United Nations notes that while most conflicts in Africa are intra-state in nature, over the past few decades, many conflicts in the continent have become more complex and regionalized undermining peace, security, stability and development²³. Wars and conflicts are having adverse impacts on every aspect and corner of the African family, community and nation-state, with economic, cultural, political, social, and environmental costs²⁴. For example, 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)²⁵. It has been observed that the protracted nature of conflicts and violence in Africa has led to the breakdown of some nations and societies

¹⁸ Moses. U.U., 'Peace Building in Africa' Op Cit

¹⁹ 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 01/09/2026)

²⁰ Gluhbegovic. R., 'Types of Conflict in Africa' Available at <https://www.eisa.org/storage/2023/05/occasional-paper-2016-types-of-conflict-in-africa-how-do-the-aprm-reports-address-conflict-south-africa-eisa.pdf> (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

²¹ Peacebuilding as Emergency Engagement: Why Africa Needs Innovation for a New Era of Crisis., Available at <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/peacebuilding-as-emergency-engagement-why-africa-needs-innovation-for-a-new-era-of-crisis/> (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

²² Ibid

²³ 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 01/09/2026)

²⁴ 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 01/09/2026)

²⁵ Ibid

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with human lives being lost, livelihoods affected, property and infrastructure damaged, healthcare and education among other vital services being severely affected and the environment damaged and degraded²⁶. Wars and armed conflicts in Africa often divert resources from development priorities to military spending, impede economic growth, decrease agricultural production, and cause food insecurity and rising costs of living²⁷. In addition, conflicts in Africa result in the killing and displacement of civilians and gross and systematic human rights violations²⁸. In some contexts, armed conflicts in Africa have led to widespread environmental damage through large-scale massacres, illicit trafficking of wildlife and endangered species, destruction of forests, and degradation of protected areas²⁹. It has been observed that the environment continues to be a silent victim of armed conflict in Africa through the use of tactics such as dumping of hazardous waste, poisoning of natural resources including water, and destruction of agricultural land³⁰.

In light of the foregoing concerns, there is need to promote peace building and restorative justice in Africa towards Sustainable Development.

3.0 Including Women in Peace Building Processes in Africa for Gender Equality and Sustainability

Due to the high incidence of wars and conflicts in Africa, effective peace building is crucial towards development and sustainability. It has been observed that peace building processes in Africa focus on addressing the reasons and factors that lead to conflicts and seek to support nations and societies to manage their differences and conflicts without resorting to violence³¹. This ideal involves a broad range of measures, focusing on either preventing, managing or addressing the root causes and effects of conflicts for peace, security, stability and development³². In particular, peace building in Africa focuses on

²⁶ Murithi. T., 'African Approaches to Building Peace and Social Solidarity' Available at <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/african-approaches-to-building-peace-and-social-solidarity/> (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

²⁷ African Development Bank Group., 'Nexus conflict and sustainability: An African perspective' Available at <https://blogs.afdb.org/climate-change-in-africa/nexus-conflict-and-sustainability-an-african-perspective-363> (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

²⁸ African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights., 'Addressing Human Rights issues in Conflict Situations: Towards a more Systematic and Effective Role for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' Available at <https://achpr.au.int/sites/default/files/files/2021-10/achprconflictstudyeng.pdf> (Accessed on 01/09/2026)

²⁹ African Development Bank Group., 'Nexus conflict and sustainability: An African perspective' Op Cit

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Muigua. K., 'Achieving Sustainable Development, Peace and Environmental Security.' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2021

³² Ibid

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restorative justice in order to promote harmony and cohesion. For example, it has been observed that due to the high incidence of wars and conflicts in Africa, the ties that link individuals and societies together are often broken undermining harmony and social cohesion³³. Promoting restorative justice is vital towards preventing conflict, building sustainable and durable relationships and repairing harm by enabling people to communicate effectively and positively³⁴. In addition, it has been observed that in the context of conflict management, restorative justice focuses on truth, healing and reconciliation towards strengthening relationships and preventing similar conflicts from reoccurring in future³⁵. In particular, due to the collectivistic nature of African societies, promoting restorative justice is essential for peace, harmony and social-cohesion³⁶.

Women have been identified as important agents in peace building and restorative justice processes. For instance, it has been opined that peace agreements reached with the active and meaningful participation of women have a higher chance of being sustainable and effective³⁷. Due to gender roles in societies, women are well positioned to support durable peace solutions and reconciliation efforts³⁸. For example, it has been argued that due to their primary role as caretakers in most African societies, women are more likely to advocate and embrace peace, reconciliation and restorative justice in order to ensure social harmony and safeguard basic necessities such as food, water, education and healthcare³⁹. In addition, since women constitute the majority of the population in most African countries, their involvement peacebuilding is key in securing effective, responsive and sustainable outcomes that take into account the needs of every person⁴⁰.

Including women in peace building and restorative justice practices in Africa is therefore important towards promoting gender equality and sustainability. Due to gender roles

³³ Murithi. T., 'African Approaches to Building Peace and Social Solidarity' Op Cit

³⁴ Restorative Justice Council., 'What is Restorative Justice?' Available at <https://restorativejustice.org.uk/what-restorative-justice> (Accessed on 02/09/2026)

³⁵ Maiese. M., & Burgess. H., 'Types of Justice' Available at https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/types_of_justice (Accessed on 02/09/2026)

³⁶ Our Mediation Heritage., Available at <https://www.conflictdynamics.co.za/Blog/Our-Mediation-Heritage-%20?swcfpc=1> (Accessed on 02/09/2026)

³⁷ European Parliament., 'Women in peace building: why and how to increase their role' Available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20250227STO27080/women-in-peace-building-why-and-how-to-increase-their-role> (Accessed on 02/09/2026)

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ 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 02/09/2026)

⁴⁰ Ibid

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and dynamics in conflicts, including women in peace building efforts is necessary in order to leverage on their differentiated knowledge and diverse perspectives, including existing coping capacities and sources of resilience for durable and sustainable peace⁴¹. The United Nations notes that the active, equal and meaningful participation and full involvement of women in peace processes is key for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security at all levels⁴². With Africa facing mounting and devastating conflicts which impact peace, security and development, involving women in peace processes is therefore crucial towards promoting Sustainable Development.

Despite their important role in peace building in Africa, it has been observed that women are often excluded from formal peacemaking and peacebuilding processes and relegated to the sidelines as observers or limited to informal peacebuilding strategies⁴³. Consequently, it is imperative to strengthen the role of women in peace building and restorative justice processes in Africa. For many decades, African women have made positive progress towards building bridges across political, ethnic, religious, clan and other divides through alliances arising from common concerns around land, access to resources such as water, and protection of their families and communities⁴⁴. Women play an important role in prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction⁴⁵. Consequently, including women in peace processes in Africa is key towards bringing a successful end to conflicts and preventing their reemergence in future through peace building and restorative justice⁴⁶.

It is therefore necessary to enhance the participation of women in peace processes towards effective peace building and restorative justice in Africa.

⁴¹ Bridging the Gap: Gender-inclusive multi-track diplomacy as environmental peacebuilding., Available at <https://www.ecosystemforpeace.org/compendium/inclusion-3> (Accessed on 02/09/2026)

⁴² United Nations Security Council., 'Resolution 1325 (2000): Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000' Available at [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1325(2000)) (Accessed on 02/09/2026)

⁴³ Affi. L., & Tonnessen. L., 'Women and Peacebuilding in Africa' Available at <https://www.cmi.no/publications/7706-women-and-peacebuilding-in-africa> (Accessed on 02/09/2026)

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ United Nations Security Council., 'Resolution 1325 (2000): Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000' Op Cit

⁴⁶ Affi. L., & Tonnessen. L., 'Women and Peacebuilding in Africa' Op Cit

4.0 Conclusion

The prevalence of wars and conflicts is a major threat to sustainability in Africa. Consequently, there is need to embrace peace building and restorative justice towards effective conflict prevention, management and post-conflict reconstruction for durable peace, harmony and development. In particular, by including women in peace building and restorative justice processes in Africa, it is possible to promote gender equality and sustainability.

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