

Peace-building, Human Rights and Rule of Law Across Africa: Examining the Role of Youth, Women and Communities in Conflict Prevention and Resolution

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Kariuki Muigua*

Abstract

This paper discusses how the ideal of effective conflict management can be achieved in Africa. The paper observes that Africa is highly susceptible to conflicts. It notes that conflicts are being witnessed across Africa undermining peace, human rights, development and the rule of law. Consequently, the paper notes that effective conflict management is key towards promoting Sustainable Development in Africa. In order to achieve this goal, the paper argues that there is need to involve all stakeholders towards peace-building, human rights and the rule of law. The paper examines how the youth, women and communities can be effectively involved in conflict prevention and resolution towards peace, human rights, the rule of law and development.

1.0 Introduction

The prevalence of conflicts all over the world is a major threat to peace, human rights and the rule of law. It has been observed that armed conflicts are on the rise globally undermining the foundations of international, regional, national and local peace and security¹. The United Nations notes that conflicts, wars, and insecurities that are being witnessed across the world undermine peace and sustainability². Global, regional and local conflicts and wars lead to instability and result in significant setbacks or even reverse decades of progress in vital areas such as economic development, public health, and food security³.

Conflicts are also fuelling human rights abuses across the world. For instance, conflicts can cause human suffering in terms of loss of lives and livelihoods, displacement of populations, destruction of social amenities and services including education and healthcare, and increased levels of poverty⁴. In particular, it has been observed that armed conflicts pose significant

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¹ United Nations., 'Fostering Peace and Sustainable Development' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/fostering-peace-and-sustainable-development> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

² United Nations., 'Global Issues: Africa' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/africa> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

³ Peace and Conflict., Available at <https://www.mercycorps.org/what-we-do/peace-conflict> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

⁴ Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency., 'Conflict Prevention: Opportunities and Challenges in Implementing Key Policy Commitments and Priorities' Available at https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2020/12/01125316/s209461_thematicoverview_conflict_prevention_webb_final.pdf (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

challenges to development and sustainability, leading to economic decline, social dislocation, humanitarian disasters, and environmental damage which often result in human right abuses⁵. Further, conflicts can also undermine the rule of law. For example, conflict-ridden regions, nations and societies are characterized by weak institutions, human rights violations, fragile political systems and divisive social relations undermining the fundamental tenets of the rule of law⁶.

In light of the foregoing, effective conflict management is necessary towards peace, human rights, development and the rule of law. Conflict management involves various strategies adopted towards avoiding, preventing, mitigating and resolving conflicts and their drivers in order to prevent them from escalating into violence⁷. The goal of conflict management is to minimise the potential negative impact that can arise from conflicts and disagreements and encourage agreement and positive outcomes⁸. It has been observed that if not well managed, conflicts can undermine development and lead to instability, violence and human right abuses⁹. On the other hand, when conflicts are successfully managed, this creates suitable conditions for peace, justice, respect for human rights, stability and prosperity towards Sustainable Development¹⁰. Effective conflict management including sound conflict prevention and resolution is therefore necessary for Sustainable Development.

This paper discusses how the ideal of effective conflict management can be achieved in Africa. The paper observes that Africa is highly susceptible to conflicts. It notes that conflicts are being witnessed across Africa undermining peace, human rights, development and the rule of law. Consequently, the paper notes that effective conflict management is key towards promoting Sustainable Development in Africa. In order to achieve this goal, the paper argues that there is need to involve all stakeholders towards peace-building, human rights and the rule of law. The paper examines how the youth, women and communities can be effectively involved in conflict prevention and resolution towards peace, human rights, the rule of law and development.

⁵ 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 13/10/2026)

⁶ United Nations., 'Land and Conflict' Available at https://www.un.org/en/land-natural-resources-conflict/pdfs/GN_ExeS_Land%20and%20Conflict.pdf (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

⁷ What is Conflict Management?., Available at <https://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/conflict-management/> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

⁸ Institute of Directors., 'Conflict Management' Available at <https://www.iod.com/resources/business-advice/conflict-management/> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

⁹ Muigua. K., 'Understanding the Place of Conflict Management in Sustainable Development Agenda' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Understanding-the-Place-of-Conflict-Management-in-Sustainable-Development-Agenda.pdf> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

¹⁰ World Bank Group., 'Fragility, Conflict & Violence' Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

2.0 Impact of Conflicts on Peace, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Africa

Conflicts have been a common occurrence across Africa for many decades. It has been observed that since most African countries gained independence, several factors have combined to trigger episodes of armed conflicts and wars across the continent¹¹. These factors include weak governance, divisive and exclusionary politics, extremist ideologies, external influence, and contested legitimacy¹². Environmental factors are also driving and worsening conflicts across Africa. For example, it has been observed that climate change is fuelling the scarcity of vital natural resources including water and arable land, triggering competition and conflicts over these resources¹³. In particular, natural resources in Africa have played a significant role in many violent conflicts by being used to finance armed wars and conflicts¹⁴. Despite being endowed with natural resources including arable land, minerals, oil and gas, forests and water, Africa has over the years suffered from resource-based conflicts which have negative impacts on economic development, peace, security and sustainability¹⁵.

It has been observed that almost all African countries have experienced some form of conflict in the recent past¹⁶. Conflict dynamics in Africa are usually rooted in a combination of factors including state weakness, corruption, ineffective delivery of basic services, competition over natural resources including land, water and minerals, inequality and a sense of marginalization¹⁷. Conflicts have had a severe impact on peace, human rights and the rule of law across Africa for many decades. Armed conflicts and wars have had adverse impacts on every aspect and corner of the African family, community and nation-state, with economic, cultural, political, social, and environmental costs¹⁸. The impacts of wars and conflicts on peace, human rights and the rule of

¹¹ Gilpin. R., 'Understanding the Nature and Origins of Violent Conflict in Africa' Available at <https://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Understanding-the-nature-and-origins-of-violent-conflict-in-Africa-Raymond-Gilpin.pdf> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

¹² Ibid

¹³ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Environmental Cooperation and Peacebuilding.' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/fresh-water/disasters-and-climatechange/environmentsecurity/environmentalcooperationand#:~:text=International%20law%2C%20environment%20and%20conflict,and%20reliance%20on%20conflict%20resources> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

¹⁴ Maphosa. S.B., 'Natural Resources and Conflict: Unlocking the economic dimension of peace-building in Africa' Available at <https://africaportal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/No.-74.-Natural-Resources-and-Conflict..pdf> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

¹⁵ Muigua. K., Wamukoya. D., & Kariuki. F., 'Natural Resources and Environmental Justice in Kenya.' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2015

¹⁶ 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 13/10/2026)

¹⁷ Armed conflict and peace processes in sub-Saharan Africa., Available at <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2022/07> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

¹⁸ 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 13/10/2026)

law in Africa include loss of human life and livelihoods, the collapse of socio-economic systems, political instability, food insecurity and the degradation of health, education, water and sanitation among other essential services across the continent¹⁹. The United Nations notes that conflicts and wars have worsened instability, insecurity, human rights abuses and humanitarian crises in Africa²⁰.

Due to the negative impacts of conflicts in Africa, effective conflict prevention and resolution are key priorities towards building and sustaining peace for development. In particular, it has been observed that peace-building is a fundamental agenda towards establishing the necessary conditions for positive and sustainable peace by addressing the deep rooted structural causes of conflicts and wars in a comprehensive and inclusive manner²¹. With Africa experiencing more protracted conflicts and humanitarian crises, effective peace-building is key towards ensuring peace, stability, development, and respect for human rights²².

Effective peace-building however remains an elusive dream for Africa. It has been observed that due to frequent conflicts in several African countries, peace has become more challenging to sustain in the continent and protracted and recurring conflict more difficult to prevent or resolve, often because their underlying causes are not well understood or addressed²³. Further, it has been observed that ineffective responses to conflicts which neglect local conflict dynamics, power relations, and civilian agency can unintentionally reinforce violence, worsen competition, legitimise abusive armed actors, and sideline community mechanisms that reduce harm²⁴. Consequently, there is need for comprehensive approaches to peace-building in Africa including through involving local actors in conflict prevention and resolution for sustainable and durable outcomes that can ensure lasting peace, human rights and respect for the rule of law in Africa.

¹⁹ Five Major African Wars and Conflicts of the Twentieth Century., Available at <https://online.norwich.edu/online/about/resource-library/five-major-african-wars-and-conflicts-twentieth-century> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

²⁰ 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)

²¹ Peace Building Initiative., 'Introduction to Peacebuilding' Available at <http://www.peacebuildinginitiative.org/index34ac.html> (Accessed on 13/10/2026)

²² 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 13/10/2026)

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 13/10/2026)

²⁴ Peacebuilding as Emergency Engagement: Why Africa Needs Innovation for a New Era of Crisis., Op Cit

3.0 Effective Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa: Embracing the Role of the Youth, Women and Communities towards Peace-building, Human Rights and Rule of Law

The prevalence of conflicts in Africa undermines peace, security, human rights and development. The adverse impacts of conflicts and wars in Africa include loss of human life, destruction of critical infrastructure, political instability, insecurity, loss of livelihoods, environmental damage, and humanitarian crises including the growth of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)²⁵. Effective conflict prevention and resolution is therefore necessary towards managing conflicts in Africa for peace, security, human rights and development. Conflict prevention is an approach that seeks to make societies to violent conflicts by strengthening by strengthening local capacities for peace²⁶. This approach provides that violent conflicts can be prevented before they break out, or at least the scope and impact of conflicts can be reduced²⁷. It has been observed that informed, timely and effective conflict prevention reduces the risk of human suffering, and saves human lives, livelihoods, property, critical infrastructure, and the environment which can be significantly impacted by conflicts and wars²⁸.

Conflict resolution on the other hand is a process whereby parties to a conflict cooperate in order to redefine their conflict and relationships towards peaceful and mutually satisfactory outcomes²⁹. Conflict resolution involves the use of voluntary, non-coercive and collaborative processes which focus on the needs and interest of parties with emphasis on Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes such as mediation, negotiation, conciliation and facilitation³⁰. It has been observed that ADR processes result in mutually satisfying outcomes that address the root causes of conflicts therefore ensuring peaceful, long-lasting and sustainable outcomes³¹.

Due to the negative impacts of conflicts in Africa, strengthening conflict prevention and resolution is therefore critical towards peace-building, human rights and rule of law. For example, conflict prevention is necessary towards providing early warnings and anticipating conflicts in Africa for timely and efficient responses that can mitigate the loss of human life, loss of livelihoods, damage to infrastructure, societal breakdown and environmental damage

²⁵ Uwazie. E., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution and Peace-building in Africa.' Op Cit

²⁶ Conflict Prevention: Opportunities and challenges in implementing key policy commitments and priorities., Available at https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2020/12/01125316/s209461_thematicoverview_conflict_prevention_webb_final.pdf (Accessed on 14/10/2026)

²⁷ Conflict Prevention., Available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/conflict-prevention_en (Accessed on 14/10/2026)

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Bloomfield. D., 'Towards Complementarity in Conflict Management: Resolution and Settlement in Northern Ireland,' *Journal of Peace Research*

³⁰ Muigua. K., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution and Access to Justice in Kenya.' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2015

³¹ Ibid

associated with conflicts and wars in the continent³². In addition, effective conflict resolution in Africa is key towards addressing the root causes of conflicts in the continent for sustainable and durable outcomes. In particular, it has been observed that ADR processes such as negotiation, mediation and conciliation provide opportunities for dialogue, collaboration and cooperation towards mutually satisfactory and long-lasting outcomes that tackle the root causes of conflicts³³. ADR mechanisms have been identified as a practical tool for peace-building and conflict resolution at both the interpersonal and community levels in Africa³⁴. Techniques such as negotiation, mediation and conciliation are well-entrenched in the traditions, customs, norms and taboos of the people of Africa³⁵. ADR processes focus on peace, harmony, truth, honesty, unity, cooperation, forgiveness, reconciliation, and respect and are therefore an appropriate forum for conflict resolution and peace-building in Africa³⁶.

In order to strengthen conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, it is imperative to involve all stakeholders including the youth, women and communities. For instance, it has been observed that the youth in peace-building is key towards strengthening reconciliation efforts, preventing crises, and advancing long-term peace and stability³⁷. Young people all over the world contribute to the resilience of their communities, proposing innovative solutions that can enhance peace, driving social progress, and inspiring political change³⁸. Due to the disproportionate impacts that they face from conflicts, peace-building is a fundamental agenda for the youth towards protecting their rights and shaping their future³⁹. Involving the youth in conflict prevention and resolution in Africa is key towards harnessing innovative ideas that promote sustainable peace and championing intergenerational dialogue and collaboration for effective, equitable, fair and sustainable peace-building⁴⁰.

³² African Union., 'Conflict Prevention and Early Warning' Available at <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/conflict-prevention-and-early-warning-booklet-13feb18-approved.pdf> (Accessed on 14/10/2026)

³³ Saaida. M., 'Peace Studies: Conflict Resolution and Mediation Strategies' Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372289839_Peace_Studies_Conflict_Resolution_and_Mediation_Strategies (Accessed on 14/10/2026)

³⁴ Uwazie. E., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution in Africa: Preventing Conflict and Enhancing Stability.' Available at <https://africacenter.org/publication/alternative-dispute-resolution-in-africa-preventing-conflict-and-enhancing-stability/> (Accessed on 14/10/2026)

³⁵ Ademowo. A., 'Conflict Management in Traditional African Society.' Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281749510_Conflict_management_in_Traditional_African_Society (Accessed on 14/10/2026)

³⁶ Awoniyi. S., 'African Cultural Values: The Past, Present and Future' *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Volume 17, No.1, 2015

³⁷ United Nations Development Programme., 'Youth and Peacebuilding' Available at <https://www.undp.org/eurasia/youth-and-peacebuilding> (Accessed on 14/10/2026)

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ United Nations., 'Youth Building Peace for a Sustainable Future' Available at <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/youth-building-peace-sustainable-future> (Accessed on 14/10/2026)

⁴⁰ Ibid

Harnessing the role of women is also necessary towards effective conflict prevention and resolution in Africa. It has been observed that throughout Africa, women participate actively across both informal and formal peace-building initiatives⁴¹. For instance, women mediate clan and household disputes using culturally grounded reconciliation and harmony practices, contribute to early warning systems through their extensive social networks, and provide critical psychosocial and economic support to survivors of conflicts and violence⁴². It has been argued that due to gender roles in societies, women are well positioned to support durable peace solutions and reconciliation efforts⁴³. 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 healthcare⁴⁴. However, despite their vital knowledge and expertise that can strengthen conflict prevention and resolution, women in Africa are often excluded from decision-making in peace and security efforts⁴⁵. It has been correctly observed that sustainable peace is only attainable when women have a voice and a seat at the table⁴⁶. It is therefore necessary to actively and meaningfully involve women in conflict prevention and resolution towards peace-building, human rights and rule of law in Africa.

Effective conflict prevention and resolution in Africa also requires the involvement of communities. It has been observed that working with communities in peace-building efforts is key towards reducing violence, building trust, and supporting non-violent solutions⁴⁷. Communities all over Africa have developed effective institutions and approaches to conflict prevention and resolution. In African communities, conflicts are viewed as a threat to peaceful coexistence and harmony⁴⁸. Consequently, African societies have throughout time adopted conflict management strategies that are geared towards amicable management of conflicts in order to preserve the social fabric which tied such communities together⁴⁹. Communities in Africa

⁴¹ Intergovernmental Authority on Development., 'Women and Peacebuilding in Northeastern Kenya: Advancing Gender-Inclusive Peace Processes under the WPS Agenda' Available at <https://igad.int/women-and-peacebuilding-in-northeastern-kenya-advancing-gender-inclusive-peace-processes-under-the-wps-agenda/> (Accessed on 14/10/2026)

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ 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 14/10/2026)

⁴⁴ 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 14/10/2026)

⁴⁵ United Nations Development Programme., 'Breaking the cycle of crisis: Women leading Peacebuilding and conflict resolution' Available at <https://www.undp.org/africa/blog/breaking-cycle-crisis-women-leading-peacebuilding-and-conflict-resolution> (Accessed on 14/10/2026)

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Peacebuilding as Emergency Engagement: Why Africa Needs Innovation for a New Era of Crisis., Op Cit

⁴⁸ Adeyinka. A., & Lateef. B., 'Methods of Conflict Resolution in African Traditional Society' *An International Multidisciplinary Journal*, Ethiopia Vol. 8 (2).

⁴⁹ Ibid

have utilised informal processes including mediation, negotiation, arbitration and conciliation in conflict resolution since time immemorial which are administered by institutions such as the council of elders⁵⁰. Therefore involving communities in conflict prevention and resolution is necessary towards promoting indigenous approaches to peace-building which have been effective in Africa for many centuries while also harnessing communal norms and values including *Ubuntu* which emphasizes peace, harmony, reconciliation and social solidarity⁵¹.

4.0 Conclusion

The prevalence of conflicts in Africa undermines peace, human rights and development. Consequently, strengthening conflict prevention and resolution is a key agenda towards peace-building, human rights and rule of law across Africa. In particular, it is imperative to involve all stakeholders including the youth, women and communities for effective and sustainable conflict prevention and resolution.

⁵⁰ 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 14/10/2026)

⁵¹ 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 14/10/2026)

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