

*Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace
and Prosperity for All*

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Abstract

This paper discusses the importance of effective conflict management in Africa. The paper notes that conflict is a common occurrence in Africa. It examines the impacts of conflicts on development in Africa. The paper further argues that effective conflict management in Africa is crucial for Sustainable Development. It suggests interventions towards effective conflict management in Africa in order to achieve harmony, human rights, peace and prosperity for all.

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Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

Table of Contents

Abstract..... 2

1.0 Introduction 4

2.0 The Need for Effective Conflict Management in Africa..... 5

3.0 Conflict Management in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges 7

4.0 Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa 11

5.0 Conclusion 14

References 15

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

1.0 Introduction

Conflict management plays a fundamental role in the Sustainable Development agenda¹. It has been noted that escalating global and regional conflicts and climate-related emergencies have substantially affected progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)². Conflicts are also reversing progress in tackling extreme poverty throughout the world³. For instance, it has been pointed out that armed conflicts pose significant challenges to development and sustainability, leading to economic decline, social dislocation, humanitarian disasters, and environmental damage⁴. Conflicts are also fueling forced migration increasing pressure on the environment and natural resources, leading to competition and further conflicts between communities⁵.

Due to their negative impacts, effective management of conflicts is necessary in order to spur peace, development and sustainability⁶. The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* acknowledges that there can be no Sustainable Development without peace and no peace without Sustainable Development⁷. Addressing conflict of whatever nature is part of the social aspects of sustainability that must be put into consideration if the Sustainable

¹ 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 10/02/2025)

² Taylor. R., 'Sustainable Development Goals and the Impact of Global Conflict, Extreme Poverty and Climate-Related Emergencies' Available at <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/sustainable-development-goals-and-the-impact-of-global-conflict-extreme-poverty-and-climate-related-emergencies/> (Accessed on 10/02/2025)

³ Ibid

⁴ 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 10/02/2025)

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Muigua. K & Kariuki. F., 'ADR, Access to Justice and Development in Kenya.' Available at <http://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ADR-access-to-justice-and-developmentinKenyaRevised-version-of-20.10.14.pdf> (Accessed on 10/02/2025)

⁷ 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 10/02/2025)

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

Development agenda is to be realised⁸. It has been noted that all SDGs are reliant on peace and preventing violent conflicts⁹. Effective conflict management is therefore necessary for Sustainable Development.

This paper discusses the importance of effective conflict management in Africa. The paper notes that conflict is a common occurrence in Africa. It examines the impacts of conflicts on development in Africa. The paper further argues that effective conflict management in Africa is crucial for Sustainable Development. It suggests interventions towards effective conflict management in Africa in order to achieve harmony, human rights, peace and prosperity for all.

2.0 The Need for Effective Conflict Management in Africa

Conflicts are a common occurrence in Africa. It is estimated that Africa hosts about 20 percent of global conflicts, which have severe consequences on national economies, societies and ecosystems¹⁰. Non-international armed conflicts are prevalent throughout the continent especially in Central and West Africa¹¹. These conflicts involve several armed groups fighting against government forces and/or against each other¹². It has been noted that conflicts in Africa are fueled and worsened by a number of factors including ethnic and religious tensions, corruption, poor governance, ineffective delivery of basic services, competition over natural resources, and a sense of marginalisation¹³.

Conflicts in Africa divert resources from development priorities to military spending, impede economic growth, decrease agricultural production, and cause food insecurity

⁸ Muigua. K., 'Understanding the Place of Conflict Management in Sustainable Development Agenda' Op Cit

⁹ Taylor. R., 'Sustainable Development Goals and the Impact of Global Conflict, Extreme Poverty and Climate-Related Emergencies' Op Cit

¹⁰ African Development Bank Group., 'Nexus conflict and sustainability: An African perspective' Op Cit

¹¹ Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law., 'Today's Armed Conflicts' Available at <https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts> (Accessed on 10/02/2025)

¹² Ibid

¹³ Davis. I., 'Armed Conflict and Peace Processes in sub-Saharan Africa' Available at <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2022/07> (Accessed on 10/02/2025)

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

and rising costs of living¹⁴. In addition, conflicts in Africa result in the killing and displacement of civilians and gross and systematic human rights violations¹⁵. These include repression of freedom of expression and media, excessive use of force by armed forces including torture, rape and other forms of sexual exploitation, and mass atrocities¹⁶. Human rights violations are also being fueled through denial of humanitarian relief in conflict situations, and destruction of critical infrastructure which supports socio-economic activities, social services and peoples' livelihoods¹⁷.

Further, conflicts in Africa are also having devastating impacts on the environment and natural resources including wildlife, protected areas, biodiversity, vital ecological sites and other natural ecosystems¹⁸. Armed conflicts in Africa are causing widespread environmental damage through large-scale massacres, illicit trafficking of wildlife and endangered species, destruction of forests, and degradation of protected areas¹⁹. Further, the environment continues to be a silent victim of armed conflict in Africa through dumping of hazardous waste, poisoning of natural resources such as water, and destruction of agricultural land²⁰.

According to the United Nations, instability and conflict in Africa continue to generate and exacerbate poverty and institutional fragility, which in turn decrease resilience and the prospects for peace²¹. It further notes that peace has become more challenging to

¹⁴ African Development Bank Group., 'Nexus conflict and sustainability: An African perspective' Op Cit

¹⁵ 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 10/02/2025)

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ African Development Bank Group., 'Nexus conflict and sustainability: An African perspective' Op Cit

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ 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 10/02/2025)

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

sustain in Africa and protracted and recurring conflict more difficult to prevent or resolve since their underlying causes are not well understood or addressed²². Effective conflict management and peace building is therefore necessary for Sustainable Development in Africa²³.

3.0 Conflict Management in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges

Africa has in place institutions and structures that play a vital role in conflict management in the continent. For instance, the Judiciary is a key organ that plays a crucial role in conflict management in African countries²⁴. It has been noted that courts are vitally important in conflict management in Africa owing to their power to interpret the law and issue binding orders²⁵. Further, it has been pointed out that the judiciary in Africa is not only crucial to ensuring fair and transparent justice but is also the bedrock of democracy and Sustainable Development²⁶. At the continental level, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights was established by African states to ensure the protection of human rights in Africa²⁷. It has been observed that despite have a limited enforcement capacity, the African Court on Human Peoples' Rights provides an avenue for redress when national judiciaries are unable to dispense justice, underscoring its instrumental role in promoting human rights norms and standards in Africa²⁸.

The Judiciary is therefore a key body in conflict management in Africa. However, it has been noted that many African countries are still struggling to establish functional, timely,

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Nantulya. P., 'Regime Capture of the Courts in Africa' Available at <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/regime-capture-courts-africa/> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Institute for Security Studies., 'The Judiciary' Available at <https://issafrica.org/chapter-5-the-judiciary/chapter-5-the-judiciary> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

²⁷ African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights., Available at <https://www.african-court.org/wpafc/> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

²⁸ Nantulya. P., & Adjolahoun. S., 'Why the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights Matters' Available at <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-court-on-human-and-peoples-rights/> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

and trusted judicial systems²⁹. Access to justice through formal court processes in Africa is affected by several challenges including costs, bureaucracy, complex legal procedures, illiteracy, corruption, distance from formal courts, backlog of cases in courts and lack of legal knowhow³⁰. Due to these challenges, it has been pointed that many African citizens have lost faith in the ability of courts to provide timely and just management of disputes³¹. Further, it has been noted that low-level disputes in Africa can spiral into conflict and violence due to the lack of effective judicial systems that can provide a credible and timely avenue for resolving differences³². Effective conflict management is therefore an urgent priority for Africa.

In addition, the African Union (AU) plays a key role in resolving conflicts in the continent³³. The AU is vital body in conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, and peace-building in Africa³⁴. It often utilises mechanisms that promote a dialogue-centred approach to conflict prevention and resolution of conflicts and establishing of a culture of peace and tolerance in Africa³⁵. The Peace and Security Council (PSC) is the standing decision-making organ of the AU for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa³⁶. The PSC is a collective security and early warning arrangement intended to facilitate timely and efficient responses to conflict and crisis situations in Africa³⁷. It has been noted that the AU has played a crucial role in conflict management

²⁹ 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 11/02/2025)

³⁰ Ojwang. J.B , "The Role of the Judiciary in Promoting Environmental Compliance and Sustainable Development," 1 *Kenya Law Review Journal* 19 (2007), pp. 19-29: 29

³¹ Uwazie. E., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution in Africa: Preventing Conflict and Enhancing Stability' Op Cit

³² Ibid

³³ Birhan. A., 'The African Union and Conflict Resolution: Challenges and Prospects' Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379070392_The_African_Union_and_Conflict_Resolution_Challenges_and_Prospects (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ African Union., 'Conflict Resolution, Peace & Security' Available at <https://au.int/en/conflict-resolution-peace-security> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

by often utilising appropriate tools such as mediation and diplomacy in peace keeping and peace building operations³⁸. In some instances, the AU has utilised peace keeping mission patrols including the AU Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) and the AU- United Nations Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) to manage violent conflicts in the continent³⁹.

Despite playing a crucial role in managing conflicts in Africa, it has been noted that AU's missions are limited by financial barriers and technical capacity⁴⁰. Further, it has been observed that AU-led peace operations are associated with limited operational capabilities, are poorly integrated with civilian-led conflict management efforts, and have failed to intervene decisively in the continent's most significant armed conflicts⁴¹.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes are also playing a crucial role in conflict management in Africa⁴². It has been noted that conflict management in African societies has for many centuries taken the form of informal negotiation, mediation, reconciliation and arbitration among other ADR techniques⁴³. These techniques fit comfortably within the concept of justice in Africa, particularly its core value of reconciliation⁴⁴. ADR in Africa has been recognised as an increasingly popular channel outside formal procedures

³⁸ Ezeibe. C., & Oguonu. C., 'African Union and Conflict Resolution in Africa' Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280155915_African_Union_and_Conflict_Resolution_in_Africa (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

³⁹ Allen. N., 'African-Led Peace Operations: A Crucial Tool for Peace and Security' Available at <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-led-peace-operations-a-crucial-tool-for-peace-and-security/> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

⁴⁰ Ezeibe. C., & Oguonu. C., 'African Union and Conflict Resolution in Africa' Op Cit

⁴¹ Allen. N., 'African-Led Peace Operations: A Crucial Tool for Peace and Security' Op Cit

⁴² Muigua. K., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution and Access to Justice in Kenya.' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2015

⁴³ 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 11/02/2025)

⁴⁴ Uwazie. E., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution in Africa: Preventing Conflict and Enhancing Stability.' Op Cit

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

to resolve disputes in timely manner, while restoring the parties' sense of justice⁴⁵. Further, ADR in Africa has been identified as a practical tool to foster peacebuilding and conflict resolution at both the interpersonal and community levels⁴⁶.

Despite being a viable tool for effective conflict management in Africa, ADR mechanisms have largely disregarded in favour of formal justice systems hence being described as 'alternative' and not 'appropriate'⁴⁷. Further, it has been argued that the indigenous practices and institutions on conflict management in Africa have largely weakened and even destroyed⁴⁸. In addition, indigenous practices and institutions of conflict management such as Alternative Justice Systems (AJS) reflect patriarchal values and can therefore discriminate against women, children, and other marginalised groups⁴⁹. Therefore, a key concern in utilizing AJS in conflict management in Africa is the potential for violation of human rights, particularly those of women and marginalised groups⁵⁰. For example, it has been observed that in some communities, women are not permitted to speak or even be present during proceedings, even if they are the victim, and must rely on male relatives to plead their case⁵¹.

Africa has in place various structures and institutions for conflict management. However, several challenges hinder the viability of these institutions affecting the ideal effective

⁴⁵ Price. C., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution in Africa: Is ADR the Bridge Between Traditional and Modern Dispute Resolution?' Op Cit

⁴⁶ Uwazie. E., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution in Africa: Preventing Conflict and Enhancing Stability.' Op Cit

⁴⁷ Muigua. K., 'Reframing Conflict Management in the East African Community: Moving from Alternative to 'Appropriate' Dispute Resolution' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Reframing-Conflict-Management-in-the-East-African-Community-Moving-from-Alternative-to-Appropriate-Dispute-Resolution-1.pdf> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

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

⁴⁹ Lee. S., 'Multiple Doors to Justice in Kenya: Engaging Alternative Justice Systems' Available at Available at <https://cic.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Multiple-Doors-to-Justice-in-Kenya-2023.pdf> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

conflict management in Africa. It is therefore necessary to foster effective conflict management in Africa in order to achieve harmony, human rights, peace and prosperity for all.

4.0 Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa

It is vital to foster effective conflict management in Africa. The continent is highly susceptible to intra and inter- state wars and conflicts⁵². The high prevalence of conflicts is a threat to peace, security, stability, human rights and Sustainable Development⁵³. Effective management of conflicts is therefore necessary to spur peace and prosperity for all.

In order to foster effective conflict management in Africa, it is imperative to embrace appropriate tools such as ADR and AJS processes and institutions⁵⁴. These processes have been part and parcel of conflict management in Africa since time immemorial⁵⁵. They are therefore well-entrenched in the traditions, customs, norms and taboos of the people of Africa⁵⁶. They are anchored in values which are held sacrosanct including peace, harmony, truth, honesty, unity, cooperation, forgiveness, reconciliation, and respect⁵⁷.

Achieving harmony is necessary for effective conflict management in Africa. Harmony has been identified as a core ideal for successful cooperation , survival, longevity, and prosperity for the entire humanity⁵⁸. Through harmony, it is possible to effectively manage conflicts and foster peace and understanding⁵⁹. It has been observed that by fostering open communication, empathy, and understanding, conflicts can be resolved in

⁵² Olaosebikan. A., 'Conflicts in Africa: Meaning, Causes, Impact and Solution.' *African Research Review*., Volume 4, No. 4 (2010)

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Muigua. K., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution and Access to Justice in Kenya' Op Cit

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ademowo. A., 'Conflict Management in Traditional African Society.' Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281749510_Conflict_management_in_Traditional_African_Society (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

⁵⁷ Awoniyi. S., 'African Cultural Values: The Past, Present and Future' Op Cit

⁵⁸ United Nations., 'The Philosophy of True Harmony in Global Citizenship' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/philosophy-true-harmony-global-citizenship> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

⁵⁹ The Art of Harmonious Coexistence: Conflict Management., Available at <https://hrme.org/the-art-of-harmonious-coexistence-conflict-management/> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

a harmonious and productive manner for sustainability⁶⁰. ADR techniques such as mediation and negotiation and AJS institutions including indigenous and customary conflict management processes are suitable in promoting harmony⁶¹. By embracing these processes, it is possible to achieve consensus since they focus on reconciliation and restoring harmony within the community⁶². ADR and AJS techniques in Africa are also anchored in the African philosophy of *Ubuntu/Utu* which places emphasis on '*being self through others*'⁶³. *Ubuntu/Utu* focuses on promoting peaceful coexistence, tolerance and cooperation serving as a moral compass in interpersonal relationships and community engagements⁶⁴. Incorporating the African philosophy of *Ubuntu/Utu* in conflict management is therefore important towards fostering harmony, peace, and reconciliation.

Peace is also a fundamental tenet for effective conflict management in Africa. It has been noted that there is link between durable peace, inclusive development, security and stability in Africa⁶⁵. However, it has been difficult to build and sustain peace in Africa since the internal and external root causes of conflicts are not properly managed⁶⁶. Addressing the internal and external root causes of conflicts in Africa beyond traditional responses which only focus on their symptoms is key in helping African countries

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ademowo. A., 'Conflict Management in Traditional African Society.' Op Cit

⁶² Orege. G., 'Conflict Management in African Traditional Religion: A Case of the Abagusii Community' Available at https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fshahidihub.org%2Fshahidihub%2Findex.php%2Fjehss%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F210%2F96&psig=AOvVaw3WH_roY43zZ2-bVyK8VxsC&ust=1739362068465000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CAQQn5wMahcKEwiw8P74y7uLAXUAAAAAHQAAAAAQBA (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

⁶³ 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 11/02/2025)

⁶⁴ What is the Spirit of Ubuntu? A Journey Into African Philosophy., Available at <https://www.communication-generation.com/what-is-the-spirit-of-ubuntu-a-journey-into-african-philosophy/#::~:~:text=Introduction-%E2%80%9CUbuntu%E2%80%9D%20is%20not%20just%20a%20word%3B%20it's%20a%20deeply,interconnectedness%20of%20all%20human%20beings>. (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

⁶⁵ United Nations., 'Root Causes of Conflicts in Africa Must Be Addressed beyond Traditional Response, Special Adviser Tells Security Council Debate on Silencing Guns' Available at <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15249.doc.htm> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

⁶⁶ Ibid

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

overcome the peace and security challenges they face⁶⁷. It has been observed that ADR mechanisms can play a pertinent role in building peace in Africa by preventing and managing conflicts and enhancing stability⁶⁸. For instance, ADR techniques such as mediation and negotiation 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 future⁶⁹. These processes encourage cooperation and collaboration among parties in managing conflicts and are thus suitable to preserving and even enhancing relationships⁷⁰. By embracing ADR, it is therefore possible to achieve peace towards effective conflict management.

Further, it is imperative to entrench human rights in conflict management in Africa⁷¹. Conflicts in Africa perpetuate human rights violations including killing of civilians, displacement of populations, excessive use of force by armed groups including torture, sexual violence including rape, while also hindering access to basic services such as health, education, and water⁷². It has been noted that there is an urgent need for institutionalising a human rights-based approach to conflict prevention, management and resolution in Africa⁷³. Human rights violations are at the heart of violent conflict and its prevention in Africa, and also constitute foundational elements of the underlying

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Uwazie. E., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution in Africa: Preventing Conflict and Enhancing Stability.' Op Cit

⁶⁹ Muigua. K., 'Resolving Conflicts through Mediation in Kenya.' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2nd Edition, 2017

⁷⁰ United Nations., 'Root Causes of Conflicts in Africa Must Be Addressed beyond Traditional Response, Special Adviser Tells Security Council Debate on Silencing Guns' Op Cit

⁷¹ Owen. D., Autio. A., & Mukarji. O., 'Preventing Conflict through Human Rights-Based Early Warning in Africa' Available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/dev4peace/preventing-conflict-through-human-rights-based-early-warning-africa#:~:text=It%20recognized%20%E2%80%9Cthe%20urgent%20need,the%20underlying%20drivers%20of%20conflict.> (Accessed on 11/02/2025)

⁷² 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' Op Cit

⁷³ Owen. D., Autio. A., & Mukarji. O., 'Preventing Conflict through Human Rights-Based Early Warning in Africa' Op Cit

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

drivers of conflict⁷⁴. Promoting human rights in Africa is therefore crucial towards building sustainable peace and preventing conflicts by addressing long-standing grievances, inequality, and the lack of opportunity that often drives and worsens conflicts in the continent⁷⁵. It is also vital to ensure that conflict management processes including ADR and AJS are anchored in human rights including gender equality and procedural fairness towards effective conflict management in Africa⁷⁶.

5.0 Conclusion

Effective conflict management is crucial in the quest towards Sustainable Development in Africa⁷⁷. The continent has the capacity to promote effective conflict management including through ADR and AJS approaches and institutions⁷⁸. It is necessary to embrace and strengthen these processes in order to achieve harmony, human rights, peace and prosperity for all in Africa.

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Lee. S., 'Multiple Doors to Justice in Kenya: Engaging Alternative Justice Systems' Op Cit

⁷⁷ United Nations., 'Root Causes of Conflicts in Africa Must Be Addressed beyond Traditional Response, Special Adviser Tells Security Council Debate on Silencing Guns' Op Cit

⁷⁸ Muigua. K., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution and Access to Justice in Kenya.' Op Cit

Towards Effective Conflict Management in Africa: Achieving Harmony, Human Rights, Peace and Prosperity for All

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