

Upholding Ethics, Integrity and Decorum in the Conflict Management Space within East Africa for Sustainability

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Upholding Ethics, Integrity and Decorum in the Conflict Management Space within East Africa for Sustainability

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Abstract

This paper discusses how ethics, integrity and decorum can be inculcated in the conflict management space within East Africa. The paper posits that effective conflict management in East Africa is vital in the pursuit of Sustainable Development. It observes that East Africa is highly vulnerable to conflicts which can undermine peace and development if not adequately managed. As a result, the paper argues that it is imperative to design effective conflict management strategies in the region in order to ensure sustainability. The paper examines the conflict management space within East Africa. It argues that the conflict management space in East Africa faces several challenges that need to be addressed for sustainable outcomes. Consequently, the paper explores how ethics, integrity and decorum can be harnessed in the conflict management space within East Africa for sustainability.

1.0 Introduction

Effective conflict management is vital for sustainability. For instance, it has been observed that where conflicts are prevalent, societies are characterized by weak institutions, violence, fragile political systems and divisive social relations undermining peace and development¹. In particular, escalating global, regional and local conflicts and climate-related emergencies have substantially affected progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)². Further, it has been pointed out that armed conflicts are on the rise all over the world posing significant

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¹ 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 05/04/2026)

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 05/04/2026)

challenges to development and sustainability, leading to economic decline, social dislocation, humanitarian disasters, and environmental damage³.

Conflicts are therefore an undesirable occurrence in any given society since they can affect peace, sustainability and development. It has rightly been pointed out that development is not feasible in conflict situations⁴. Consequently, effective conflict management is vital in spurring peace, development and sustainability. It has been pointed out that addressing conflict of whatever nature is part of the social aspects of sustainability that must be put into consideration if the Sustainable Development agenda is to be realised⁵. This goal is enshrined under the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* acknowledges that there can be no Sustainable Development without peace and no peace without Sustainable Development⁶.

It has been observed that ethics and integrity play a key role in conflict management by ensuring respect for the rule of law, efficiency, fairness and enhanced access to justice⁷. Upholding ethics, integrity and decorum in conflict management processes and strategies can therefore lead to sustainable outcomes for peace and development.

This paper discusses how ethics, integrity and decorum can be inculcated in the conflict management space within East Africa. The paper posits that effective conflict management in East Africa is vital in the pursuit of Sustainable Development. It observes that East Africa is highly

³ 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 05/04/2026)

⁴ 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-development-in-KenyaRevised-version-of-20.10.14.pdf> (Accessed on 05/04/2026)

⁵ 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 05/04/2026)

⁶ 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 05/04/2026)

⁷ Muigua. K., 'Promoting Professional Conduct, Ethics, Integrity & Etiquette in ADR' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Promoting-ProfessionalConduct-Ethics-Integrity-Etiquette-in-ADR.pdf> (Accessed on 05/04/2026)

vulnerable to conflicts which can undermine peace and development if not adequately managed. As a result, the paper argues that it is imperative to design effective conflict management strategies in the region in order to ensure sustainability. The paper examines the conflict management space within East Africa. It argues that the conflict management space in East Africa faces several challenges that need to be addressed for sustainable outcomes. Consequently, the paper explores how ethics, integrity and decorum can be harnessed in the conflict management space within East Africa for sustainability.

2.0 The Conflict Management Space within East Africa

Effective conflict management is vital for regional integration and development within East Africa. It has been observed that for many decades, the East African region has been highly susceptible to violent and non-violent, sporadic and occasional, and endemic and intractable conflicts⁸. Conflicts within East Africa have been attributed to various triggers including political, social, structural, economic and cultural factors⁹. In particular, it has been observed that fight for political control, tussles over dwindling natural resources, and denial of human rights and needs are some of the major causes of conflicts within East Africa¹⁰.

It has been pointed out that the East African region continues to struggle with cycles of complex and serious situations of conflict and fragility¹¹. Conflicts in the region often lead to killing of civilians, gender-based violence and humanitarian crises including displacement of populations and influx of refugees¹². In particular, it has been observed that civilians bear the brunt of armed conflicts in East Africa¹³. During armed conflicts, civilians are unlawfully killed, driven from their homes and denied access to vital humanitarian aid¹⁴.

⁸ Chikwanha. A.B., 'The Anatomy of Conflicts in the East African Community (EAC): Linking Security With Development' Available at <https://www.ascleiden.nl/pdf/lectureanniechikwanha.pdf> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict., 'Eastern and Central Africa' Available at <https://www.gppac.net/regions/eastern-and-central-africa#:~:text=Our%20priorities,armed%20violence%20in%20the%20region.> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

¹² Ibid

¹³ Human Rights Watch., 'East Africa, Horn: Civilian Suffering in Armed Conflict' Available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/01/16/east-africa-horn-civilian-suffering-armed-conflict> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

¹⁴ Ibid

The prevalence of conflicts in East Africa has negative impacts on the political, economic and social fabric of the region¹⁵. It has been asserted that conflicts and instability make East Africa one of the most unstable regions in the world¹⁶. Consequently, effective conflict management is key towards regional stability and development in East Africa. The need for effective conflict management in East Africa is set out under the *Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community*¹⁷. The Treaty requires member states of the East African community to preserve peace and security within the community including through peaceful resolution of conflicts and disputes between and within the partner states¹⁸.

Conflict management in East Africa is governed by various approaches. For instance, it has been observed that informal/traditional conflict resolution strategies play a key role in managing conflicts at the local level within East Africa¹⁹. Informal justice systems in East Africa, including customary and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, are often more accessible, culturally-sensitive and affordable than formal justice systems²⁰. It has been pointed out that these processes aim to promote and achieve social justice and inclusion, especially among communities and groups that have been excluded from the formal justice system²¹. Throughout East Africa, institutions such as elders and local peace committees play a key role in conflict management through informal justice systems²².

¹⁵ Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict., 'Eastern and Central Africa' Op Cit

¹⁶ United States Agency for International Development (USAID)., 'East Africa Regional Conflict and Instability Assessment: Final Report' Available at <https://land.igad.int/index.php/documents-1/countries/uganda/conflict-7/1187-east-africa-regional-conflict-and-instability-assessment-usaid-2012-1/file> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

¹⁷ The Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community., Available at https://www.eala.org/uploads/The_Treaty_for_the_Establishment_of_the_East_Africa_Community_2006_1999.pdf (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

¹⁸ Ibid, article 123 (4) (d)

¹⁹ Judiciary of Kenya., 'Promoting Alternative Justice Systems (AJS)' Available at <https://judiciary.go.ke/promoting-alternative-justice-systems-ajs/> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Kariuki. F., 'Community, Customary and Traditional Justice Systems in Kenya: Reflecting on and Exploring the Appropriate Terminology' Available at <https://land.igad.int/index.php/documents-1/countries/kenya/conflict-3/535-community-customary-and-traditional-justice-systems-in-kenya-reflecting-on-and-exploring-the-appropriate-terminology/file> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

²² Ibid

In addition, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes including arbitration, mediation and conciliation are being widely embraced in conflict management in East Africa²³. It has been observed that many countries in East Africa including Kenya and Uganda are recognising and institutionalizing ADR processes to manage disputes including family disputes, civil disputes, commercial disputes and labour disputes²⁴. ADR processes including mediation, negotiation, conciliation and arbitration are well-anchored in the culture and customs of the people of East Africa and Africa at large and are therefore appropriate in the quest towards effective conflict management²⁵.

Courts also play an important role in conflict management in East Africa. At a regional level, the *Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community* establishes the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) to contribute to regional Integration by ensuring adherence to justice, rule of law and fundamental rights and freedoms through the interpretation and application of the Treaty²⁶. National courts also play a key role in enhancing access to justice within the various countries in East Africa.

East Africa therefore has a vibrant conflict management space comprising of various approaches and techniques including informal justice systems, ADR processes, a regional court and national courts. However, with many countries in the region still plagued by conflicts, it is imperative to strengthen the conflict management space within East Africa for sustainability. In particular, it has

²³ Reassessing the implementation of ADR in East Africa: How can National and Regional Courts enhance their ADR Practice., Available at <https://www.eacj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Reassessing-the-implementation-of-ADR-How-can-National-and-Regional-Courts-enhance-their-ADR-practice.pdf> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

²⁴ Intergovernmental Authority on Development., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution as a Viable Tool in Land Conflicts: A Kenyan Perspective' Available at <https://land.igad.int/index.php/documents-1/countries/kenya/conflict-3/530-alternative-dispute-resolution-as-a-viable-tool-in-land-conflicts-a-kenyan-perspective/file#:~:text=ADR%20is%20now%20being%20recognized,labour%20disputes%20among%20other%20areas>. (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

²⁵ Awoniyi. S., 'African Cultural Values: The Past, Present and Future' *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Volume 17, No.1, 2015

²⁶ The Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community., Article 23

been observed that upholding ethics and integrity in conflict management is vital towards achieving sustainable and durable peace for development²⁷.

3.0 Upholding Ethics, Integrity and Decorum in the Conflict Management Space within East Africa

Ethics, integrity and decorum play a pertinent role in conflict management. Ethics refer to a system of moral principles that determine what is good or bad for individuals and society in a given context²⁸. It has been observed that ethics provide a lens for humanity to base its morality and shape its decision-making process²⁹. On the other hand, integrity refers to a moral virtue and principle that involves acting with honesty, decency and fairness³⁰. Integrity has been identified as a central value in human relationships which requires people to act with honesty, sincerity, and authenticity towards each other³¹. In addition, decorum entails the maintenance of professional, disciplined and respectful behaviour³².

It has been observed that ethics play an important role in conflict management since they ensure respect for the rule of law, efficiency, fairness and enhanced access to justice³³. Adherence to ethical principles enhance sustainability, justice, and inclusion in conflict management and peace processes³⁴. In addition, it has been pointed out that by upholding ethics, it is possible to foster

²⁷ Muigua. K., 'Promoting Professional Conduct, Ethics, Integrity & Etiquette in ADR' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Promoting-ProfessionalConduct-Ethics-Integrity-Etiquette-in-ADR.pdf> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

²⁸ Ethics: A General Introduction., Available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/intro_1.shtml (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

²⁹ Sustainability Methods and Perspectives., Available at <https://pressbooks.pub/sustainabilitymethods/chapter/ethics-in-sustainability/#:~:text=Environmental%20ethics%20focuses%20on%20the%20relationship%20between%20human%20beings%20and,it%20can%20best%20be%20protected> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

³⁰ Integrity., Available at <https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/integrity> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

³¹ Integrity., Available at <https://www.awork.com/glossary/integrity> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

³² Leading with Integrity and Decorum in the Modern Era., Available at <https://marymount.edu/blog/forbes-leading-with-integrity-and-decorum-in-the-modern-era/#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

³³ Muigua. K., 'Promoting Professional Conduct, Ethics, Integrity & Etiquette in ADR' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Promoting-ProfessionalConduct-Ethics-Integrity-Etiquette-in-ADR.pdf> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

³⁴ Aryal. R., 'Role of Ethics in Conflict Negotiation: A Narrative Review' Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391042350_Role_of_Ethics_in_Conflict_Negotiation_A_Narrative_Review (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

public confidence, acceptability, and legitimacy of dispute resolution processes³⁵. Further, it has been argued that integrity underpins trust, fairness, and credibility for effective conflict resolution³⁶. In particular, it has been pointed out that integrity ensures procedural fairness fostering trust among parties and fostering legitimacy of outcomes³⁷. On the other hand, decorum ensures the maintenance of professional, respectful and disciplined behaviour towards sustainable and durable outcomes³⁸.

Upholding ethics, integrity and decorum in the conflict management space within East Africa is therefore key towards sustainable and durable outcomes for peace and development. Achieving this goal involves ensuring that the various conflict management strategies comply with ethics, integrity and decorum. For instance, it has been observed that legitimizing Alternative Justice Systems (AJSs) and ensuring training and accreditation of AJSs providers including elders and traditional dispute resolvers can ensure that conflict management through AJSs upholds ethics, justice, integrity and human rights³⁹. In addition, there is need for all parties in ADR including dispute resolvers (such as conciliators, mediators and arbitrators), lawyers and parties representatives and ADR institutions to embrace ethical and integrity standards including competence, independence, impartiality, fairness and avoiding conflict of interest towards enhancing access to justice for peace and development⁴⁰. Upholding ethics, integrity and decorum in regional and national courts is also key for effective conflict management in East Africa. For instance, it has been observed that upholding ethics, integrity and decorum in regional courts including the EACJ enables these courts to effectively interpret and apply regional treaties, foster

³⁵ Menkel-Meadow. C., 'Ethics in Alternative Dispute Resolution: New Issues, No Answers from the Adversary Conception of Lawyers' Responsibilities' Available at <https://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2758&context=facpub> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

³⁶ What is the Importance of Integrity in Alternative Dispute Resolution?., Available at <https://www.uniwriter.ai/law/what-is-the-importance-of-integrity-in-alternative-dispute-resolution/> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Leading with Integrity and Decorum in the Modern Era., Op Cit

³⁹ Judiciary of Kenya., 'Alternative Justice Systems Baseline Policy and Policy Framework.' Available at <https://judiciary.go.ke/download/alternative-justice-systems-baseline-policy-and-policy-framework/> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

⁴⁰ Muigua. K., 'Promoting Professional Conduct, Ethics, Integrity & Etiquette in ADR' Op Cit

human rights and strengthen regional integration⁴¹. Further, upholding ethics, integrity and decorum in national courts is crucial in enhancing access to justice since it ensures that judicial officers are able to make the right decisions while free from external pressure and irrespective of the personal interests or economic and political implications involved in cases⁴².

4.0 Conclusion

The East Africa region is highly vulnerable to conflicts which undermine peace, development and regional integration⁴³. Effective conflict management is therefore vital for peace, development and sustainability in East Africa. In particular, inculcating ethics, integrity and decorum in the various conflict management approaches in East Africa including AJSs, ADR and court processes is key in fostering fairness, human rights, justice, public confidence, acceptability, and legitimacy of conflict management⁴⁴. Upholding ethics, integrity and decorum in the conflict management space within East Africa is a noble and achievable dream towards sustainability.

⁴¹ Murungi. L., & Gallinetti. J., 'The Role of Sub-Regional Courts in the African Human Rights System' Available at <https://sur.conectas.org/en/role-sub-regional-courts-african-human-rights-system/> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

⁴² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime., 'Judicial Immunities Promote Fair and Impartial Judgments' Available at <https://www.unodc.org/dohadeclaration/en/news/2020/03/judicial-immunities-promote-fair-and-impartial-judgments.html> (Accessed on 07/04/2026)

⁴³ United States Agency for International Development (USAID)., 'East Africa Regional Conflict and Instability Assessment: Final Report' Op Cit

⁴⁴ Muigua. K., 'Promoting Professional Conduct, Ethics, Integrity & Etiquette in ADR' Op Cit

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