Women's Equal Participation as Agents of Peace in Africa: Achieving Inclusivity, Justice and Sustainability in Conflict Management

Kariuki Muigua

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Kariuki Muigua[*]

Abstract

This paper examines how the ideal of peace can be achieved in Africa. The paper argues that the prevalence of conflicts in Africa is a major threat to peace and Sustainable Development. It examines how conflicts impede development in Africa. In light of these concerns, the paper argues that sound conflict management in Africa vital in the quest for peace and development. In particular, the paper notes that involving women in peace processes can strengthen conflict management strategies and approaches in Africa for development. The paper discusses how women can be effectively involved as agents of peace in Africa for inclusivity, justice and sustainability in conflict management.

1.0 Introduction

Securing peace is a key global priority in the quest for Sustainable Development. It has been argued that at its core, peace encompasses far more than just the absence of violence or conflict[1]. Peace is a state of harmony, justice, equality and compassion which enables individuals, communities and nations to coexist in respect and understanding for human progress and development[2]. The United Nations correctly notes that peace and development are indivisible[3]. Peace has been described as a fundamental precondition

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[*] PhD in Law (Nrb), FCIArb (Chartered Arbitrator),OGW, LL. B (Hons) Nrb, LL.M (Environmental Law) Nrb; Dip. In Law (KSL); FCPS (K); Dip. in Arbitration (UK); MKIM; Mediator; Consultant: Lead expert EIA/EA NEMA; BSI ISO/IEC 27001:2005 ISMS Lead Auditor/ Implementer; ESG Consultant; Advocate of the High Court of Kenya; Professor of Environmental Law and Conflict Management at the University of Nairobi, Faculty of Law; Member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) [December, 2025].

[1] Gray Group International., 'Understanding Peace: A Comprehensive Guide to Achieving Global Harmony' Available at https://www.graygroupintl.com/blog/peace (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[2] Ibid

[3] United Nations., 'Sustainability, Peace, Security 'best guarantee against instability' Guterres to Security Council' Available at https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/sustainability-peace-security-%E2%80%98best-guarantee-against-instability%E2%80%99-guterres-security-council (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

for social and economic development[4]. For example, without peace, societies and nations are often plagued by conflict, violence, and instability which can hinder progress and result in the loss of lives, livelihoods, resources and environmental damage[5]. On the other hand, peace is associated with better economic outcomes, human progress and well-being and high levels of environmental protection all which are vital in the pursuit of Sustainable Development[6]. The United Nations *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[7]* recognises that there can be no Sustainable Development without peace and no peace without Sustainable Development[8].

Achieving the ideal of peace however remains a challenge for the global community. For instance, it has been observed that conflicts are on the rise globally undermining peace and Sustainable Development[9]. Conflicts especially those that are violent in nature are an undesirable since they affect peace, sustainability and development[10].It has been correctly noted that development is not feasible in conflict situations[11]. For example, conflicts 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 security[12]. In conflict-ridden situations, development operations are disrupted due to the unreliable social

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[4] United Nations., 'Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions' Available at https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/ (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[5] Ibid

[6] Defining the Concept of Peace: Positive & Negative Peace., Available at https://www.visionofhumanity.org/defining-the-concept-of-peace/ (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[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 15/12/2025)

[8] Ibid

[9] Peace and Conflict., Available at https://www.mercycorps.org/what-we-do/peace-conflict (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[10] Muigua. K., 'Reframing Conflict Management in the East African Community: Moving from Alternative to 'Appropriate' Dispute Resolution.' Available at https://kmco.co.ke/wpcontent/uploads/2023/06/Reframing-Conflict-Management-in-the-EastAfrican-CommunityMoving-from-Alternative-to-Appropriate-Dispute-Resolution (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[11] 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 15/12/2025)

[12] Peace and Conflict., Op Cit

services resulting in the prevalence of problems such as poverty, hunger and inequality[13]. It has been argued that communities and nations experiencing conflict have higher rates of poverty in comparison to more stable communities with estimates indicating that nearly two thirds of the world's poorest people will live in conflict-affected areas by 2030[14].

In light of the foregoing, effective conflict management is key in ensuring peace and Sustainable Development. Due to the lasting impact of conflicts on development, effective, efficient and expeditious conflict management is a desirable ideal in order to spur peace, development and sustainability[15]. In particular, the prevalence of conflicts in Africa requires urgent and effective conflict management strategies and approaches in order to foster peace, justice and development[16].

This paper examines how the ideal of peace can be achieved in Africa. The paper argues that the prevalence of conflicts in Africa is a major threat to peace and Sustainable Development. It examines how conflicts impede development in Africa. In light of these concerns, the paper argues that sound conflict management in Africa vital in the quest for peace and development. In particular, the paper notes that involving women in peace processes can strengthen conflict management strategies and approaches in Africa for development. The paper discusses how women can be effectively involved as agents of peace in Africa for inclusivity, justice and sustainability in conflict management.

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[13] The Link Between Peace and Sustainable Development., Available at https://www.adecesg.com/resources/blog/the-link-between-peace-and-sustainable-development/ (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[14] Peace and Conflict., Op Cit

[15] 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 15/12/2025)

[16] United Nations Development Programme., 'Strengthening Peacebuilding Efforts Across Africa Key to Achieving Inclusive, Sustainable Development' Available at https://www.undp.org/africa/news/strengthening-peacebuilding-efforts-across-africa-key-achieving-inclusive-sustainable-development (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

2.0 The Need for Effective Conflict Management in Africa

The prevalence of conflicts and wars in Africa is undermining efforts towards Sustainable Development. It has been argued that for many decades, Africa has been highly susceptible to intra and inter- state wars[17]. Many African countries have experienced wars and conflicts including civil wars and military coups that have fuelled political instability and insecurity[18]. It has been argued that almost all African countries have experienced some form of conflict in the recent past[19]. 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 development[20].

Conflicts in Africa are motivated and worsened by several factors. For example, it has been argued that disputes over political power, religious and ethnic tensions, corruption, ineffective justice systems, inequalities in access to basic services, competition over natural resources and poor governance frameworks are major causes of conflicts and wars in Africa[21]. In particular, it has been argued that mismanagement of the proceeds of natural resources in Africa has led to the proliferation of armed conflicts and other criminal activities in the continent[22]. Due to poor governance, corruption and inequitable benefit-sharing arrangements, Africa's abundant natural resources including land, water,

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

[18] Africa Center for Strategic Studies., 'Africa's Crisis of Coups.' Available at https://africacenter.org/infocus/africa-crisis-coups/ (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[19] 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 15/12/2025)

[20] 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 15/12/2025)

[21] Ibid

[22] Fagbadebo. O., Binza. M., Kabange. M., 'Resource-Based Conflicts in Africa' Available at https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-25151-1_6 (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

minerals, oil and gas have become a source of conflicts rather than driving development and human progress[23].

The high incidence and protracted nature of conflicts in Africa is a major threat to peace and sustainability. For example, conflicts and wars are worsening instability, human rights abuses and humanitarian crises in Africa thus undermining development[24]. It has been argued that wars and conflicts in Africa have had adverse economic, cultural, political, social, and environmental costs[25]. Conflicts and wars in Africa lead to loss of human life, destruction of property and critical amenities, loss of livelihoods, human right abuses and environmental damage[26].

Due to the prevalence of conflicts in Africa, achieving peace is a fundamental objective if the Sustainable Development agenda is to be realised. It has been argued 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 addressed[27]. It has been correctly noted that understanding and addressing conflict drivers, including external and historic, is a prerequisite for sustainable peace, development and prosperity in Africa[28]. Effective conflict management in Africa is therefore key towards building and maintaining durable peace for Sustainable Development.

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[23] Ibid

[24] 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 15/12/2025)

[25] 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 15/12/2025)

[26] Ibid

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

[28] United Nations., 'Sustainable Development to Deliver Sustainable Peace' Available https://www.un.org/osaa/ru/content/sustainable-development-deliver-sustainable-peace#:~:text=National%20governments%20and%20local%20level,undermining%20the%20sustainable%20development%20goals. (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

3.0 Women as Agents of Peace in Africa: Prospects and Challenges

Achieving peace in Africa is necessary for Sustainable Development. It has been argued that through appropriate conflict management strategies, African countries can secure lasting peace towards sustainability[29]. Effective conflict management is key in understanding the origin, development and dynamics of conflicts in Africa towards effectively addressing conflicts and enhancing prospects for peaceful social, economic and political development in the continent[30]. According to the African Union, the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa is vital in fostering peace, security and development[31]. If further notes that embracing mechanisms that promote a dialogue-centred approach to conflict prevention and resolution is vital in establishing a culture of peace and tolerance in Africa[32].

In particular, it has been argued that embracing the role and participation of women in conflict management techniques can strengthen the prospects of peace and development in Africa[33]. The United Nations Security Council notes that equal participation and full involvement of women in peace processes is key for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security at all levels[34]. This is due to the fact that women are key agents in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction[35]. They play a pivotal role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction[36]. Consequently, it has been

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

[30] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 'Conflict Management in Africa' Available at https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/conflict-management-in-africa_9789264163164-en.html#:~:text=Abstract,needed%20within%20broader%20development%20efforts. (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[31] African Union., 'Conflict Resolution, Peace & Security' Available at https://au.int/en/conflict-resolution-peace-security (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[32] Ibid

[33]

[34] 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) (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[35] Ibid

[36] Ibid

argued that peace agreements reached with the active participation of women have a better chance of being sustainable and effective[37]. Due to different gender perspectives and approaches to conflicts, the participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution can improve outcomes before, during, and after conflict[38].

The involvement of women in conflict management is therefore key towards securing lasting peace and development in Africa. 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 in order to safeguard basic necessities such as food, water, education and healthcare[39]. Further, women constitute the majority of the population in most African nations as a result, their involvement peacebuilding is key in securing effective, responsive and sustainable outcomes that take into account the needs of every person[40]. It has been argued that giving women a full and active voice is vital in developing meaningful and sustainable approaches to peacebuilding in Africa[41]. Women's formal participation in peace negotiations is vital in bringing a successful end to conflicts and preventing their reemergence in future[42].

Women's equal participation as agents of peace is therefore necessary for effective conflict management in Africa. However, it has been observed that African women are usually sidelined and excluded from peacemaking and peacebuilding processes in most conflict situations[43]. It has been argued that while women can make an important

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[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 15/12/2025)

[38] Women's Participation in Peace Processes., Available at https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/index.html (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[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 15/12/2025)

[40] Ibid

[41] Affi. L., Tonnessen. L., & Tripp. A., 'Women and Peacebuilding in Africa' Available at https://www.cmi.no/publications/7706-women-and-peacebuilding-in-africa (Accessed on 15/12/2025)

[42] Ibid

[43] Ibid

contribution towards building and sustaining peace, they often take a back seat in peace negotiations[44]. Social, economic and legal inequalities in some societies prevent women from taking part in peace deals and conflict management approaches[45]. In the African context, it has been argued that the role of women as agents of peace is undermined by cultural barriers, use of gender-based violence including rape and sexual assaults during armed conflicts and gender inequalities in economic and political spheres[46].

It is imperative to address the foregoing challenges in order to bolster the role of women as agents of peace in Africa for development.

4.0 Conclusion

With Africa being highly susceptible to conflicts and wars, the equal and full participation of women in peacebuilding is vital in preventing and managing conflicts in the continent for peace and prosperity. Promoting the meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, management, and resolution, and post-conflict relief and recovery efforts is necessary in building and maintaining peace for Sustainable Development[47]. It is therefore imperative to ensure that women play an active and important role in the design and implementation of post-conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities through their meaningful involvement in peace negotiation and mediation efforts in Africa[48]. Further, adequate financial and technical support is crucial in strengthening the role of women organisations in peacebuilding efforts[49]. In addition, by fostering gender equality across all spheres of life including in the economic and political contexts, women can be adequately empowered to participate in decision-making processes including

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[44] European Parliament., 'Women in peace building: why and how to increase their role' Op Cit
[45] Ibid
[46] Agbajobi. D., 'The Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding' Op Cit
[47] Women & Peacebuilding., Available at https://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/women-peacebuilding (Accessed on 15/12/2025)
[48] Agbajobi. D., 'The Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding' Op Cit
[49] Ibid

peacebuilding[50]. Fostering women's equal participation as agents of peace in Africa is therefore key towards achieving inclusivity, justice and sustainability in conflict management for Sustainable Development in Africa.

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

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