

# The African Union and Conflict Resolution: Challenges and Prospects

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## Abstract:

With an emphasis on the difficulties and opportunities the AU faces, this paper explores the role of the African Union (AU) in resolving conflicts in Africa. Using secondary data sources from scholarly publications, studies, and official AU papers, the research takes a qualitative approach. The research investigates the efficacy of the AU's projects and the challenges faced in resolving conflicts by examining the organization's efforts in conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, and peace-building. The findings clarified the constraints caused by political meddling, a lack of political will, finance, and resources, the complexity of African conflicts, and regional and global dynamics on the continent. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the research emphasizes how the AU may support conflict resolution by utilizing its mediation procedures, early warning systems, and alliances with domestic and foreign organizations. The study underscores the need for ongoing efforts to address the root causes of African conflicts and improve the AU's capacity to resolve disputes.

**Keywords:** African Union, conflict resolution, challenges, prospects, Africa

## 1. Introduction:

The African Union (AU) is vital to settling disputes on the African continent. The African Union (AU) has actively promoted conflict resolution and stability to promote sustainable peace and security. Agenda 2063, which emphasizes the significance of appropriate institutions for conflict prevention, management, and resolution, serves as the AU's direction in its endeavors (Uwa & Iloh, 2022). As demonstrated by situations like the Nile River dispute, regional intergovernmental organizations like the AU have been crucial to preventing and resolving conflicts (Musau, 2023). To handle complex security challenges and conflicts in Africa, cooperation between the AU and other

international organizations, such as the European Union (EU), has also been crucial (Kangdim et al., 2022).

The goal of the AU's founding was to improve Africa's ability to effectively manage and resolve crises, ushering in a new era of conflict resolution on the continent (Apuuli, 2020). The AU's participation in conflict resolution has been reinforced by its cooperation in missions such as the Liberian conflict settlement with other regional and international organizations, including the United Nations (Issaka & Gök, 2022). Since Rwanda's genocide in 1994, the AU has demonstrated its commitment to resolving conflicts before they become unmanageable crises, as seen

by the creation of frameworks for conflict prevention and resolution (Akech, 2020).

The inability of the African Union to resolve conflicts in countries like South Sudan, Libya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Central African Republic shows that challenges still face the organization (Mlambo & Dlamini, 2019). There are questions about the African Union's ability to effectively handle the rising number of violent and conflict-filled incidents in the twenty-first century (Mlambo & Dlamini, 2019). However, the AU has significantly contributed to peacekeeping efforts, with missions combating extremist organizations and terrorist activity in addition to peace negotiations (Szabó, 2023).

To sum up, even if the African Union plays a crucial role in resolving conflicts throughout the continent, it has to do a lot to ensure peace despite ongoing obstacles. The African Union (AU) strives to establish lasting peace and security throughout the continent by cooperating with regional and global partners. By addressing crises and advancing stability in Africa, the AU is committed to achieving its goals, guided by Agenda 2063 and bolstered by its peacekeeping deployments.

### **1.1. Background Context of the African Union (AU)**

Promoting collaboration and integration among African countries is a major function of the African Union (AU), a prominent continental organization. The African Union (AU) is a comprehensive cooperation of African nations established in Durban, South Africa, on July 10, 2002 (Lumina, 2022; Rein, 2017). As the Organization of African Unity's replacement, it has developed into a significant force in African affairs. According to Williams (2009), the main goals of the African Union are to safeguard human rights, advance economic growth, and promote peace, security, and stability throughout the continent.

So, the African Union (AU) is a major actor in resolving disputes on the African continent. Perpuuli (2020) states that the African Union's mandate includes preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts to promote peace and security.

Apuuli (2020) reports that the group has formed its funding channels for peacekeeping activities and has adopted programs like "Silencing the Guns" to prevent conflict outbreaks. As seen by the frameworks for conflict prevention and resolution established in the wake of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the AU is committed to resolving disputes before they worsen (Akech, 2020).

In addition, the AU has accepted financial help for several projects, including security assistance, through partnerships with foreign organizations such as the European Union (EU) (Vines, 2010). According to Nieuwkerk (2011), the African Union's attempts to manage disputes and foster peace in cooperation with regional economic communities, such as ECOWAS and SADC, are demonstrated by what the organization does.

The AU plays a significant role in peacekeeping operations because it handles terrorist-related situations and mediates peace in conflict zones (Szabó, 2023). The organization works with regional economic communities (RECs) such as SADC and ECOWAS to improve its capacity to handle conflicts (Nieuwkerk, 2011). A decision-making body for crisis management, the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) considers military action and humanitarian assistance (Arthur, 2017). Furthermore, the AU collaborates closely with the UN through organizations like the UNOCA and UNOAU to support attempts at conflict settlement (Putra, 2020).

The use of coercive diplomacy by the AU in conflict management, as demonstrated in the example of Burundi, further emphasizes the organization's role in conflict resolution (Wilén & Williams, 2018). The organization's dispute resolution policy is based on its commitment to maintaining democratic principles, including ensuring that elections are free and fair (Issaka & Gök, 2022). The African Union's activities align with Agenda 2063, especially with Aspiration 4, which calls for early warning systems and dialogue-centered peace-building strategies to achieve a safe and peaceful Africa (Uwa & Iloh, 2022).

In summary, many initiatives are included in the African Union's conflict resolution mission to avert, control, and resolve conflicts within the continent. The African Union (AU) is instrumental in promoting peace and security throughout the continent through programs such as "Silencing the Guns," cooperation with regional organizations, and participation in peacekeeping missions.

## 1.2. Significance of Conflict Resolution in Africa

Conflict resolution is essential in Africa, where there has always been war, and peace and development must last. Numerous scholarly investigations and publications underscore the importance of conflict resolution in Africa and offer valuable perspectives on diverse facets of this undertaking. The significance of resolving conflicts involving former combatants is one crucial point underlined in the literature. In Africa, efforts to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate former combatants have been essential to resolving conflicts and fostering peace (Ayissi, 2021). By helping ex-fighters reintegrate into society, these programs hope to lessen the chance that violence may flare up again. Resolving conflicts requires an understanding of the ecological and cultural aspects.

According to Uwa and Iloh (2022), who have discussed Agenda 2063 of the African Union, the success of conflict resolution processes is critical to attaining lasting peace and security in Africa. Long-term peace goals cannot be achieved without effective institutions for conflict management, prevention, and resolution. Furthermore, by encouraging conciliatory attitudes and actions in unresolvable conflicts, applying emotional intelligence and regulation can improve conflict resolution procedures (Halperin, 2013). To promote productive conversation and amicable settlements, it is essential to comprehend emotions and how to control them.

Literature shows how crucial conflict resolution is to Africa's efforts to promote stability, growth, and peace. In conclusion, resolving conflicts in Africa is critical because it affects regional integration, international relations, humanitarian situations,

peace, stability, and economic development. A country's standing internationally can be improved, human suffering can be reduced, resources can be redirected toward socioeconomic advancement, regional cooperation can be promoted, and the core causes of disputes can be addressed when African conflicts are resolved. Africa can strive toward a better future by prioritizing conflict resolution and fostering wealth, peace, and the welfare of its people.

## 2. The African Union's Function in Africa's Conflict Resolution

The African Union (AU) is a key player in the continent's conflict resolution process, and it uses various strategies to manage, avoid, and end conflicts. Because there are so many African wars, the African Union's actions are essential to preserving the continent's peace and security. The African Union's Peace and Security Council is critical for resolving disputes because it was founded to handle global peace and security dangers in Africa (Majinge, 2011). Through this council, the AU handles terrorist-related situations, peacekeeping missions, and negotiations between warring parties (Szabó, 2023). The AU's engagement in conflict resolution encompasses post-election issues, as demonstrated by its endeavors to offer alternatives for settling such disagreements (Sixpence et al., 2021).

In addition, the African Union's involvement in conflict resolution is consistent with its broader objectives, including objectives 2063, which prioritizes long-term peace and security throughout the continent (Uwa & Iloh, 2022). The AU understands that to accomplish its long-term goals, appropriate institutions for conflict management, prevention, and resolution are essential (Uwa & Iloh, 2022). Apart from that, the AU works with regional economic communities such as ECOWAS to improve security and peace on the continent (Terwase et al., 2018).

The AU bases its conflict resolution strategy on the views of indigenous Africans toward justice and peace. The Acholi Justice System in Northern Uganda and the gacaca courts in Rwanda are two

examples of African traditional dispute settlement processes that have impacted AU initiatives (Tafese, 2016). According to Tafese (2016), these indigenous institutions provide African solutions to African challenges by emphasizing community engagement and inclusivity in conflict resolution procedures. Therefore, via supporting efforts to establish peace and defend democratic values, regional institutions like ECOWAS and the African Union play essential roles in conflict resolution in Africa (Issaka & Gök, 2022). These groups offer structures for settling disputes and upholding regional stability.

Conclusively, the African Union plays a diverse role in conflict resolution, which includes peacekeeping, negotiating, and utilizing native methods for conflict settlement. In keeping with its mission to resolve disputes and advance lasting peace in Africa, the AU significantly contributes to stability and development throughout the continent by prioritizing peace and security. Though praiseworthy, there are still difficulties with the AU's efforts to resolve conflicts. The intricacy of certain situations, logistical limitations, and a lack of funding make effective intervention challenging. Disputing parties' noncompliance can also challenge the African Union's capacity to uphold peace accords and enforce rulings.

### **2.1. The AU's Mandate in Conflict Resolution**

As mentioned in the AU Constitutive Act of 2000, one of the primary AU mandates is to facilitate peace, security, and stability on the continent. Peacekeeping missions, peace-building initiatives, and mediation endeavors are all part of the African Union's conflict resolution mandate. To handle crises in various parts of Africa, the African Union has been actively involved in deploying peacekeeping missions. As stated by Khudaykulova (2023), these missions are a component of the African Union's endeavors to uphold peace and security throughout the continent.

The AU's participation in peacekeeping missions is a crucial component of its mandate for resolving conflicts. The African Union (AU) has carried out

multiple peacekeeping operations in conjunction with global allies like the United Nations (UN) and regional associations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). According to Gaibulloev et al. (2015), these operations seek to safeguard civilians, stabilize conflict-affected areas, and advance the peace process. Additionally, to settle disputes and advance long-lasting peace in Africa, the AU has been involved in peace-building and mediation projects. The AU aims to resolve crises by addressing their underlying causes and promoting communication among parties involved through diplomatic initiatives and talks. According to Steiner et al. (2009), the African Union promotes stability and harmony over the long run by negotiating peace agreements and aiding with post-conflict reconstruction.

Working with other international actors like the UN, EU, and individual nations is another aspect of the AU's conflict resolution role. Cooperative efforts with these partners in areas afflicted by violence increase the efficacy of peacekeeping and peace-building programs. These organizations can combine resources, knowledge, and political backing to tackle intricate security issues (Wilén & Williams, 2018).

In conclusion, the AU's responsibility for resolving conflicts is broad and includes peace-building mediation and peacekeeping initiatives. The African Union (AU) is essential to advancing peace and security in Africa because of its proactive engagement in resolving disputes. The AU improves its ability to settle disputes and promote stability on the continent by working with foreign allies and regional organizations.

### **2.2. Mechanisms and Tools Used by AU for Conflict Resolution**

The African Union (AU) works to advance peace and security on the continent by utilizing a range of conflict resolution structures and methods. Wilén and Williams (2018) noted that coercive diplomacy is a crucial AU strategy. This tactic entails managing problems successfully by threatening action while pursuing diplomatic methods. The

AU's attempts to resolve conflicts depend heavily on its ability to be trusted when using coercive diplomacy.

As mentioned by (Uwa & Iloh, 2022), the AU prioritizes dialogue-centered peace-building, early warning sign detection, and other conflict resolution tools in addition to coercive diplomacy. Through peace education and research, these mechanisms hope to promote a culture of peace and tolerance throughout Africa. By emphasizing communication and early conflict detection, the AU hopes to resolve problems before they become uncontrollable crises.

In addition, the AU has created an institutional framework for conflict management, prevention, and resolution, as (Akech, 2020) emphasizes. This framework was created in reaction to tragedies such as the Rwandan genocide in 1994, highlighting the necessity of taking preventative action to resolve conflicts. The AU can better handle disagreements by having mechanisms to prevent and resolve problems. In addition, the African Union works with regional intergovernmental organizations to avoid and settle disputes, as Musau (2023) examined. This cooperative strategy makes it possible to resolve conflicts in a coordinated manner, utilizing the assets and capabilities of different regional organizations to improve conflict resolution results.

According to (Freire et al., 2016), despite these attempts, obstacles like financial limitations and a lack of political will affect the AU's ability to participate in crises effectively. For the AU to become a more active player in conflict prevention and resolution, it must tackle these issues. In conclusion, the African Union (AU) uses a range of strategies to resolve conflicts throughout the continent, including institutional frameworks, early warning systems, dialogue-centered methods, coercive diplomacy, and cooperation with regional organizations. The AU can improve its capacity for resolving conflicts and contribute to long-lasting peace and security on the continent by wisely utilizing these structures and tools while tackling current issues.

### 2.3. Success and Limitations of the AU in Resolving Conflicts

Throughout the continent, the African Union (AU) has taken a leading role in resolving conflicts by creating frameworks for their management, prevention, and settlement (Akech, 2020). According to reports, the African Union (AU) has assisted in resolving conflicts in several African nations, such as South Sudan, Libya, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic (Mambo and Dlamini, 2019). However, the AU's efficacy in resolving disputes has been investigated, and its mediation attempts have produced various results.

The African Union (AU) has seen several noteworthy instances of successful conflict resolution on the continent. The African Union (AU) has achieved some success with the establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture (PSC), which comprises the Peace and Security Council (PSC) that makes decisions during times of conflict (Arthur, 2017). From humanitarian aid to military action when required, the APSA has offered a framework for handling crises (Arthur, 2017). Furthermore, the AU has advanced governance, security, and peace norms, even though obstacles still stand in the way of accomplishing its goals (Khadiagala, 2020).

The African Union mediated the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the long-running civil conflict between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in 2005. Furthermore, the AU's deployment of peacekeeping troops in Somalia has helped the nation to gradually stabilize, allowing for the reinstatement of a legitimate government and the containment of extremist organizations like Al-Shabaab. Moreover, the 2010 post-election conflict in Côte d'Ivoire was resolved, and the AU's mediation efforts made a peaceful handover of power possible. These illustrations show the AU's dedication to resolving disputes and its capacity to promote stability and constructive change throughout Africa.

The AU's attempts at dispute settlement are constrained despite these efforts. According to Szabó (2023), the African Union's need for outside assistance, encompassing both military and financial resources, suggests a weakness in its ability to resolve disputes autonomously. Furthermore, impeding the AU's efficacy in resolving conflicts include disagreements, uneven diplomatic capacity, and disparities in political influence in its dealings with other organizations such as the UN (Bokeriya, 2022). Moreover, the AU's peace-building endeavors have faced hindrances in accomplishing the objectives delineated in its policies (Khadiagala, 2020).

To sum up, the African Union has successfully created conflict resolution frameworks like the African Peace and Security Agreement (APSA) and advancing peace and security norms throughout the continent. Notwithstanding, there are still constraints in the AU's ability to tackle crises autonomously, its dependence on outside assistance, and difficulties in accomplishing its peace-building goals. If the AU wants to be more effective in resolving conflicts and promoting stability throughout Africa, these problems must be addressed.

### **3. Challenges Faced by the African Union in Conflict Resolution**

The African Union (AU) encounters formidable obstacles in resolving disputes, impeding its ability to uphold stability and safety throughout the continent. The complexity of wars in Africa, money and resource scarcity, political meddling and lack of political will, and regional and global factors influencing efforts at conflict settlement are the four primary categories into which these issues can be divided.

First, the biggest challenge facing the AU in resolving conflicts is a lack of finance and resources (Musau, 2023). The organization cannot carry out peacekeeping missions, provide humanitarian help, or support efforts at mediation in war zones due to a lack of funds. Due to this budgetary limitation, the African Union cannot adequately handle disputes around the continent,

which prolongs instability and insecurity (Arthur, 2017).

According to Akech (2020), the AU's efforts to resolve conflicts are weakened by political meddling and a deficiency of political will among member states. National political ambitions frequently trump international efforts to promote security and peace. This meddling can potentially undermine the authority and efficacy of the AU in resolving disputes by impeding the execution of judgments and resolutions (Magara, 2022).

Thirdly, the complexity of African conflicts is a vital difficulty facing the AU (Sixpence et al., 2021). Intricate webs of obstacles that the AU must negotiate in its conflict resolution efforts include post-election crises, ethnic tensions, resource disputes, and terrorism. The complexity and resources of the AU may be strained by these multidimensional conflicts, which call for careful planning and persistent involvement (Uwa & Iloh, 2022).

Lastly, regional and global factors make the AU's efforts to resolve conflicts more difficult (Nieuwkerk, 2011). The AU's capacity to resolve disputes successfully is impacted by its interactions with the UN, other international players like China, and regional economic groups. The AU's peace and security mandate is made more difficult by coordinating with numerous parties, handling conflicting interests, and navigating power dynamics at the regional and global levels (Bokeriya, 2022).

In conclusion, the African Union faces significant obstacles in resolving problems, including a lack of resources, political meddling, the complexity of these issues, and dynamics both inside and between other countries. To tackle these obstacles, coordinated actions are needed to gather sufficient funding, encourage political will, improve capacity for conflict analysis, and fortify relationships with local, national, and international players. For the African Union to carry out its goal of fostering peace, security, and stability in the continent, these challenges must be overcome.

#### 4. Prospects for the African Union in Conflict Resolution

The African Union (AU) is crucial in resolving conflicts on the continent. Several strategies can be implemented to increase the AU's efficacy in resolving disputes. Firstly, diplomatic efforts within the AU can be enhanced by applying mutual and respectful experience-sharing among research collaborators and establishing clear rules of engagement. This approach can foster trust and cooperation among conflicting parties, essential elements in successful conflict resolution. Secondly, empowering African researchers to participate actively in designing and implementing conflict resolution initiatives can guarantee that solutions are sustainable and relevant to the context.

The AU has much potential to resolve conflicts through cooperation with regional and global partners. It highlights regional organizations' importance in peacekeeping efforts, especially in Africa (Williams, 2017). The AU can obtain more resources, knowledge, and diplomatic backing to successfully handle issues by utilizing alliances with institutions such as the UN and regional agencies. Moreover, Fish and Walton (2012) observed that capacity-building initiatives with foreign partners can improve the African Union's capability to handle and settle disputes. This is evident in projects on maritime protected areas.

The AU's successful attempts at conflict settlement provide insightful case studies for subsequent initiatives. The African Union (AU) can promote peace processes among its member nations, as evidenced by its role in mediating the peace accord in South Sudan in 2018 (Williams, 2017). The AU may improve its conflict resolution methods and strategies through critical analysis and practical application of these effective interventions. Furthermore, alliances such as the North-South-South cooperation among HEIs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa, and Norway, as addressed by, demonstrate the benefits of cooperative endeavors in enhancing research competencies and capabilities. Similarly, the AU stands to gain from cultivating alliances that

advance information sharing and expand its conflict resolution capabilities.

In conclusion, the African Union (AU) has a lot of potential to settle disputes on the continent. First, conflicts can be resolved before they become severe crises with the support of the African Union's ongoing commitment to preventative diplomacy and mediation initiatives. The AU can avert conflicts from worsening and lessen the toll that protracted violence takes on society and its citizens by participating in early intervention and dialogue facilitation. In addition, the AU's expanding peacekeeping forces, such as the African Standby Force, improve its ability to respond quickly to crises and uphold security and stability. Increasing the AU's capacity to handle new conflicts and aid in post-conflict reconstruction initiatives can be accomplished by strengthening these capacities.

Finally, by focusing strongly on regional cooperation and integration, the AU gives its member nations a forum to work together to resolve disputes via discussion and negotiation, promoting a climate of peace and stability. These elements indicate a bright future for the AU in resolving African disputes. By implementing efficacious measures, the AU may further enhance its ability to mediate conflicts and foster peace and stability throughout the continent by capitalizing on partnerships and learning from previous achievements.

#### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

##### 5.1. Conclusion

The African Union (AU) has both formidable obstacles and opportunities in conflict resolution. Despite significant progress in resolving conflicts throughout the continent, the African Union still faces several obstacles. These difficulties include a lack of funds and resources, political meddling and a lack of political will, the complexity of African conflicts, and the influence of regional and global factors on African efforts to resolve disputes. However, there are also chances for cooperation with regional and global partners, ways to strengthen the African Union's involvement in

resolving conflicts, and case studies or instances of the organization's effective work in this area. The AU's dedication to preventive diplomacy, mediation initiatives, and advancing peacekeeping skills also provides hope for the future. The AU can be crucial in preventing, managing, and ending African crises by improving its ability to intervene early, bolstering its peacekeeping forces, and encouraging regional integration and cooperation. Sustainable peace and stability can also be facilitated by the AU's emphasis on inclusivity, community involvement, and the involvement of local actors.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the AU is a crucial player in determining the future of Africa because of its commitment to resolving disputes and its ability to impact the continent positively. We must acknowledge that solid conflict management and resolution institutions are critical to achieving AU Agenda 2063 (Uwa & Iloh, 2022). The African Union (AU) can overcome obstacles and take advantage of opportunities to establish a more peaceful and prosperous continent of Africa by persisting in its efforts and working together. In conclusion, the AU's efforts to resolve conflicts are at a crucial point.

## 5.2.Recommendations

A number of important suggestions can be made to improve dispute resolution within the African Union (AU). First and foremost, to handle such tensions before they worsen, the AU should prioritize preventative diplomacy by actively participating in early warning systems and mediation initiatives. This can be accomplished by bolstering the current mediation capacities and establishing regional centers for dispute resolution. To guarantee a thorough and integrated approach to conflict resolution, the AU should promote collaboration and coordination with other pertinent regional organizations and economic communities. This would include exchanging information, coordinating the implementation of peace-building projects, and harmonizing policy. The AU should also invest in capacity-building and training initiatives for its peacekeeping troops to guarantee

that they have the tools and knowledge necessary to respond to crises on the continent.

Additionally, the AU must support inclusive and participatory methods of peace-building that incorporate women, youth, marginalized groups, and civil society organizations into the decision-making process. Finally, through focused programs and policies, the AU should prioritize sustainable development and address the underlying issues that lead to conflicts, such as poverty, inequality, and difficulties with governance. By implementing these suggestions, the AU can improve its efforts to resolve disputes and support long-term stability and peace throughout Africa.

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