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# **Conflict Management in Africa: The Role of the Civic Society**

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**ABSTRACT:** Conflict management in Africa remains a complex challenge, requiring innovative approaches that extend beyond state-led interventions. Civic society has emerged as a critical player in peacebuilding, mediation, and reconciliation efforts across the continent. This paper explores the role of civic society organizations (CSOs) in conflict resolution, emphasizing their contributions to peace negotiations, advocacy, grassroots mobilization, and policy influence. By analyzing historical and contemporary case studies, the research highlights both the successes and challenges of civic engagement in conflict management. Furthermore, the paper examines theoretical frameworks that underpin civic society's role in peacebuilding and discusses strategies for enhancing their impact. The findings suggest that strengthening collaboration between CSOs, governments, and international organizations is essential for sustainable peace in Africa. Ultimately, this study underscores the need for capacity-building, political tolerance, and innovative conflict resolution mechanisms to empower civic society in its peacebuilding efforts.

**KEYWORDS;** Conflict management in Africa, Civic society and peacebuilding, Grassroots conflict resolution, Mediation and reconciliation, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in peace processes, Sustainable peace and governance

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Civil society is having a more direct involvement in peace processes and conflict resolution. The conflict management paradigm is taking a broader view, highlighting the necessity for involving local and fundamentally African practitioners in all phases of peacekeeping and peacebuilding projects. Observations gathered on programs for conflict resolution waged in a series of African countries reveal a confident concordance between different sections of the society in overseas conflict resolution scenarios, and a feeling of predisposition against the practices and understandings adopted by the civic society itself. There is a direct involvement in the support of peace education plans, but little involvement in creating new grounds for negotiation and mediations. A growing attention to interfere directly in peacemaking is to be noticed, however, the military nature of the majority of peace-making attempts seems unsettling for the civic society community. In addition, not only there is a lack of trust in the role played by the mediators, but there also seems a growing sentiment that the beginning and the presence of the third party is detrimental to the direct and unconditioned engagement pursued by local activists (Obadare, 2015). Founding inspired attempts to offer an alternative vision of civil society with comparatively potential of acknowledgment in Africa such as a quest for dignity, equity, and democracy; that led to the portray both African states and civic societies are in the same murky waters and ambivalent: both are contradictory constructs that may comprise value; both African states have flouted most democratic and normative principles of civil society and civic societies, while displaying, victimizations, liberties, and alternative practices have also been agents of oppression, hegemony, and tribal or neo-tribal tyranny; and this has been a long process, encompassing the pre-colonial background, national emancipation, and postindependence era, and continuing until present time or even escalating in



the context of a permeating culturalism and latent radicalism. Subsequent retrospective arguments aimed at explaining the communities' 'provincialism,' 'inertia,' or 'backwardness' in the field of civic involvement. The additional assessments try, instead, to uncover the macro-political, cultural, and economical obstacles that are preventing a genuine and autonomous civic engagement; thereafter, the outcomes of the analyses shift attention towards the potential benefits and virtues to be found in the (paradoxical) endorsement of 'tribal' interests, strategies, and discourses. The discourse also paves the way for a wide range of reflections on the implications that the concept and practices of civil society hold for most of the continent's populations. (Ferreira and Richmond2021)

## II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF CONFLICT IN AFRICA

Conflicts have been part of the continent of Africa since pre-colonial time. With this in mind, one needs awareness about the historical background of conflict before analyzing societal disruptions in different countries or engaging in conflict management. Currently, Africa is notorious for its persistent conflicts. It is not clear though whether such conflicts are symmetrical throughout the continent. Given the immense size of the continent having as many as 54 recognized states, a variety of cultures and socio-political structures, it is more likely that these conflicts are diversified. For a newcomer in the field of conflict management it may be hard to comprehend what these conflicts are about, where they come from and over what they are contested. This forming section, then, attempts to sketch the historical background of conflicts in Africa from selected, but noteworthy angles. (Anderson et al.2021)

A current debate revolving around "Afro-pessimists" and "Afro-optimists" gives an overview of the dynamics of conflicts inside Africa. With the rise of an era of "new conflicts" or "wars of the third kind", recognition of complexity and diversity of conflict analyses have become indispensable. Here the view is prevalent that many of Africa's "new wars" epitomize a fractured nature with respect to other armed disputes mostly seen in the 1990s. The political, social and economic landscapes have changed profoundly with complex multi-sided interactions between state and non-state actors, where modes of violence present a blurring of the distinctions between war and organized crime as well as between combatants and civilians. This has led to rich scholarly and practitioner activities examining a wide array of issues. Yet, most of this literature concentrates on the dynamics of conflict in a particular region and does not reveal or even consider those in other areas. An extended focus is shifted here to a variety of cases with the aim to show that what contestation and over what is fought in different parts of Africa is diverse. This, it is believed, enlightens novel conflict managers about the complexity and multifariousness of African conflicts. (Ofori, 2024)



Figure 1; Operational Control and Internal Audit

## III. THE CONCEPT OF CIVIC SOCIETY

In discussing the role and contributions of civic society in conflict management in Africa, it is appropriate to clarify the concept of civic society. Fundamentally, 'civic society' refers to diverse organizations and groups, both formal and

informal (registered and unregistered), which are involved in service delivery to promote social welfare, justice, and equity. The concept implies direct civic involvement and participation of individuals in governance structures, as well as participation in the decision-making processes at the community and national level. Broadly, 'civic society' refers to a social grouping that goes beyond personal interests, beyond kinship ties, and beyond narrow sectarian concerns. In a wider range of interpretation, it implies any collective action of citizens to promote community welfare and to contribute to the building of better social structures. Such civic society is exemplified by the involvement of individuals who are inspired by community principles and are able to maintain the interests of the community to build or strengthen democratic processes. In circumstances of armed conflict, civic society plays constructive roles, such as that of being a mediator or building relationship bridges among warring factions. Different models of civic society can be discerned, ranging from rural-rooted small scale organizations to nation-wide coalitions. Civic society can campaign policy and other social justice issues, it can also act as a watch-dog to hold governmental structures accountable. It can mount pressure, often publicly, to ensure that policy and other frameworks are constructed in ways that comply with the principles of human rights. There are many occasions when civic society has taken a stance against policy which promotes profitability at the expense of people, or restricts freedom of expression and association (Makumbe, 2015). In some instances, there can be cultural and institutional tensions between civic organizations and existent government structures. The conflicts can be seen in the civil society's perception that the government is adhering to 'inappropriate' development models or planning strategies. The reverse can be said: that the state argues that the civic organizations are influential in promoting detrimental policies or practices. In sum, there can exist dormant or explicit hostilities among civil actors in the attempt to promote peace and development. Yet, a core element of post-conflict reconciliation is seen to lie with civic engagement. In particular, reconciliation processes were considered as opportunities for civic intergroup dialogues, and attempts to build substantive community and organization relationships across divides. Increasingly, national policy built around the principles of democracy, transparency and good governance is slowly emerging in support of civic society.

#### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The section aims at mapping the various theoretical frameworks that underpin conflict management practices intending to provide a structured understanding of the various issues involved. The section attempts to propose ways in which civic society in Africa can mobilise and utilise such frameworks with practical applications by illustrating how civic society have used them in disputes in Botswana and Nigeria. By way of a selection of conflict situations that occur in Africa, a broader discussion of how such theoretical insights can shape applications will be undertaken. (Annan et al.2021)(Mubangizi, 2022)



Fig. 2; Cost Control and Internal Audit

A theoretical framework is essential to organise thinking about conflict management. It provides a way of considering key factors that shape the intervention of intervening parties in disputes. (W Budd & Colvin, 2014) suggested four such organisational frames: neoliberal egoist, critical, unitarist, and pluralist. These might be broadly used to comprehend the form of conflict management work but need to be comprehensively interpreted in order to shed light on particular disputes. This examination suggests a range of theoretical frameworks that might be used to understand the roots of proactive strategies, peace building, reconciliation, and negotiation, and those frameworks are also interrogated with regard to the question of how civic society becoming involved in disputes and what the implications of this involvement are. Numerous conflict management scholars have discussed what conflict management has to offer for peace building, but less consideration has been given to what peace building has offered to conflict management beyond very basic definitions of each (Forsyth, 2015). Thus, this investigation asks how different but related conflict management and peace building operate in Africa, particularly with reference to civic society, and how such understandings might further shape both theoretical research and practical applications. At the same time, there has been little investigation of how different schools of thought or disparate models or styles capable of moving peacefully from conflict to conciliation are compared with a specific dispute and then considered according to how civic society may act. In this context an Urhobo dispute in Nigeria will first provide an example of how a variety of scholars, activists, and NGO workers have understood and acted in a conflict situation. This is considered with reference to the broader literature on peacebuilding, reconciliation and cultural theory on 'truth telling' and the 'translation of cultural stories'. Subsequently, how different approaches were successful and were failed is interrogated. This is undertaken with reference to the wider examination of so-called 'alternative dispute resolution' (ADR). Given the enormous range of possibilities, what is presented here is designed to be merely a sample of the variety of approaches both theoretically and practically, and by no means exhaustive or definitive. (Avruch2022)

#### **V. CASE STUDIES OF CIVIC SOCIETY INVOLVEMENT IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

This case illustrates a civic society organization drawing on the full range of traditional West African conflict management approaches – rooted in law, mediation, and negotiation through a hierarchical council-based structure – to intervene in, and resolve, a major inter-ethnic conflict in Liberia. For over fifteen years, Liberian women, including representatives of the two warring ethnic groups, participated in a program based on both socio-cultural and humanitarian support as well as community dialogue funded by women in Ghana. As a result, for the first time since 1985, the traditional reconciliation practices held. This positive result was made possible not only by the involvement of the opposing political parties but also by the presence of civic society partners addressing political, economic and social causes of war such as poverty alleviation and post-war reconstruction. The coalition was spearheaded by a number of powerful civic society actors, with the UNDP playing a facilitator role (Awonnatey Ateng & Abazaami, 2016).

This case study examines the development and success of a regional conflict resolution initiative begun in 1999, aimed at fostering the peaceful co-existence of pastoralists with livestock and farming populations in Kenya and Uganda. Concerned with the increase in violent incidents arising from land and water disputes, the organization amalgamated the conflict management expertise of NGOs in each country to adopt a number of integrated strategies combining established methods of civic society-led conflict transformation with locally-designed activities. After 2 and a half years, the situation has stabilized significantly, with a substantial reduction in violence and an easing, but not resolution, of disputes. Commercial mediation skills have been transferred to local actors who are now resolving disputes independently, and a civic sector forum at the district level has been established to act as a future platform for conflict prevention (Beştaş, 2017).

#### **VI. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CIVIC SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

The engagement of civil society in conflict management is vital for peaceful coexistence and social harmony. However, the role of civil society in peacebuilding is largely limited through political restrictions, religious barriers, a shortage of funds, and capacity constraints in conflict theory and conflict analysis. This is juxtaposed to the escalating level of violence, displacement, and genocide taking place in African conflicts. This addresses the challenges and opportunities for civic society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in conflict management. It also elaborates on the roles and functions of CSOs and NGOs in peacebuilding in contemporary Africa. (Ishkanian et al.2023) As an integral pillar of civil society, CSOs in African countries engage in a multifaceted manner in conflict management, mitigation or resolution. This occurs through prevention, negotiation and accommodation, as well as post-conflict



rehabilitation, reconstruction, and transformation efforts. Furthermore, CSOs in conflict management continue to emerge with the support of the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, and other international organisations that are becoming actively engaged in the promotion of peacebuilding and a culture of peace. Accordingly, the relationship between African CSOs and international organisations is being restructured in such a way as to render it more effective and efficient (Awonnatey Ateng & Abazaami, 2016). Given the challenges of CSO engagement in conflict management, new technologies, including social media, need to be utilised for remodelling or meshing existing models of engagement. In the face of the growing influences of violence, coercion, poverty, disillusionment, and globalism that have exacerbated adverse conditions or conflicts, especially in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, CSOs should pursue innovative approaches to prevent disagreement, promote dialogue and negotiations, as well as to establish networks and coalitions at the national, regional, and global levels. In this respect, empowerment and capacity building of civil society with the knowledge of conflict analysis and resolution, as well as with comprehensive conflict management theories and awareness, should be vigorously endorsed at the grass-roots levels. Nevertheless, innovative CSO conflict management strategies entail political tolerance, economic and social justice, empowerment, and morale building at the highest level of governance. Such diverse but coordinated efforts may yield sustainable peace across communities, societies, and political entities. In conclusion, conflict management can be expected to effectively deal with conflict and coexistence in African communities in an all-inclusive manner.

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