



How African Organisations Envision Peacemaking

AU, IGAD and SADC policies and
structures for African solutions

Michael Aeby



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The Global Transitions Series looks at fragmentations in the global order and how these impact peace and transition settlements. It explores why and how different third-party actors – state, intergovernmental, and non-governmental – intervene in conflicts, and how they see themselves contributing to reduction of conflict and risks of conflict relapse. The series critically assesses the growth and diversification of global and regional responses to contemporary conflicts. It also asks how local actors are navigating this multiplicity of mediators and peacebuilders and how this is shaping conflict outcomes and post-conflict governance.

Author: Michael Aeby
Series Editor: Mateja Peter
Managing Editor: Mia Furlong
Design: Smith Design Agency

PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform
School of Law
Old College
The University of Edinburgh
South Bridge
Edinburgh
EH8 9YL

Tel. +44 (0)131 651 4566
Fax. +44 (0)131 650 2005
E-mail: peacerep@ed.ac.uk
PeaceRep.org
Twitter: @Peace_Rep_
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PeaceRepResearch>
LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/peacerep/>
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About the author: Michael Aeby is a Visiting Academic at the University of Edinburgh and a Research Associate of the University of Cape Town's Institute for Democracy, Citizenship and Public Policy in Africa. He holds a PhD and MA from the University of Basel. Michael's research is concerned with the African Peace & Security Architecture, civil society inclusion in peace processes, mediation, agreement implementation, transitional governance, and coups d'états in Africa.

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Abstract

The African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (REC) have become pivotal peacemakers in the two decades since they began the construction of a joint African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) with the objective to provide “African solutions to African problems.” The African organisations have developed normative policy frameworks and organisational structures for mediation and preventive diplomacy. The peacemaking institutions, which were developed with the assistance of international development partners, reflect the long-standing peacemaking experience, practices and principles of the African organisations, as well as international norms, technical standards and peacebuilding paradigms. Whereas the African organisations and Western states share a catalogue of common values, in peacemaking interventions, their priorities and approaches often diverge.

This policy brief explores how African organisations envision peacemaking, how the African solutions differ from Western approaches, and to what extent the approaches are compatible. To this end, it reviews the policy frameworks and structures for peacemaking of the AU, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and Southern African Development Community (SADC). The study forms part of PeaceRep's Global Transitions project, which examines the role of non-Western state actors and intergovernmental organisations in the management of conflicts and peace processes worldwide.

Key Findings

- ▶ The policy principles guiding peacemaking activities by the AU, IGAD and SADC include national sovereignty and non-interference, anti-imperialism, the responsibility to protect, subsidiarity between the AU and RECs, the promotion of democracy, human rights and development, inclusion of civil society and non-dominant groups, as well as women's participation and gender sensitivity.
- ▶ The functioning, capacity and interplay of structures, including decision-making organs, mediators, panels for peace diplomacy, liaison offices, mediation support structures and early warning systems, varies considerably between the AU, IGAD and SADC. These systems combine entrenched practices, including mediations led by heads of states and eminent elder African statesmen, with mediation support structures that reflect international technical standards.
- ▶ The peacemaking approaches of African organisations and Western states are highly compatible thanks to shared democratic values and developmental goals. Frictions may relate to Western conflict interventions and perceived interference in internal affairs of sovereign African nations that can prompt anti-imperialist sentiments.
- ▶ Since African-led mediations generally enjoy greater legitimacy and acceptance among African governments, Western development partners, ideally give political support to APSA mediations based on their common democratic values and provide incentives to conflict parties to enter negotiated settlements.

Introduction

The AU and RECs have become pivotal peacemakers since the construction of the APSA was initiated with the adoption of the 2002 Protocol on the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), which held its first meeting in May 2004 (AU 2002; Williams 2009, 603). In 2017, the African intergovernmental organisations, which constitute APSA building blocks, engaged in peace diplomacy in 27 instances and conducted 13 mediations (IPSS 2019, 22). In 2018, the African organisations mediated in 14 conflicts and facilitated 13 peace agreements (IPSS 2020, 42, 52). The aspiration to provide African solutions rather than to depend on international interventions was the rationale to create the APSA and for the continued elaboration of structures for conflict prevention, peacemaking and peace operations (AU 2002 Preamble; Apuuli 2018). To strengthen their peacemaking capacity, the AU and RECs have, to varying extents, elaborated normative policy frameworks, mediation guidelines, standing panels for peace diplomacy and mediation support structures. The peacemaking institutions, which were developed with the assistance of international development partners and technical experts, reflect the long-standing peacemaking experience, practices and principles of the African organisations as well as international norms, technical best-practice standards and peace research paradigms (Aeby 2021, 1–7).

The AU and RECs, which have the objective to promote peace, development, and democracy, share a catalogue of norms with Western states that are enshrined in the organisations' constitutive treaties and polices on peace and security. (AU 2000; IGAD 1996; SADC 2001a) Yet, in conflict interventions in African states, the priorities, interests and approaches of African organisations and Western actors often diverge. In conflicts where the normative priorities and interests of the AU, RECs, Western states converge, African organisations can devise timely and effective peacemaking interventions. The AU mediation in Kenya (2008 - 2013), for instance, could rely on unequivocal international support, resources of the United Nations (UN) and "carrots and sticks" which Western development partners offered to conflict parties (AU 2014d, 231–41; Khadiagala 2008, 14; Lindenmayer and Kaye 2009, 23; Wanyeki 2018, 12). In cases where African mediations lack Western support because political imperative diverge, as in the SADC mediation in Zimbabwe (2007-13), contestations over the modalities of crisis responses may erode the authority of the mediator and disincentivise parties to commit to agreements. (Aeby 2016b, 93–98; 2017) Where African and international organisations, backed by African and Western states, compete over the leadership of mediations, cacophonous international responses may encourage parties to seek a better deal in another forum (Nathan 2017b; Lanz 2021; Witt 2017).

This study contributes to PeaceRep's Global Transitions project, which examines the role of non-Western state actors and intergovernmental organisations in managing conflicts and transition processes worldwide. The primary objective of the study is to explore how African organisations envision peacemaking. The discussion, moreover, aims to assess how the envisaged African solutions are different from prevalent Western peacemaking approaches. To this end, the study first reviews the policy framework for peacemaking of the AU, IGAD and SADC, focusing on principles relating to sovereignty, the right to intervene, anti-imperialism, subsidiarity, liberal democracy, development, civil society inclusion, and women's participation. The policy analysis comprises 21 constitutive treaties, protocols, strategic plans, and mediation guidelines. It highlights the application of policy principles using secondary literature and communiqués relating to conflict interventions.

Secondly, the study outlines the workings of the African organisations' structures for mediation and preventive diplomacy. The discussion is based on 13 key-informant interviews and focuses on the AU, IGAD and SADC as the organisations are among the most active peacemakers in the APSA (Coe and Nash 2020, 163). Before examining the policies and structures, the study reviews literature debating the concept and distinctive features of African solutions with regards to peacemaking.

Whereas critiques of liberal peacebuilding have come to inform policy-making, for the purpose of the analysis, this study and the overarching Global Transitions project we consider Western approaches to be largely in line with the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, which aims at twin transitions leading to peace and democracy. The liberal peacebuilding paradigm is rooted in liberal democratic norms and seeks to achieve peace through the promotion of institutions for electoral democracy, the rule of law, human rights, market economies and civil society (Montiel, Fröhlich, and Brand-Jacobsen 2010; Labonte 2009; Richmond and Visoka 2021).

African Solutions for African Problems?

The development and workings of the APSA are underpinned by the mantra of "African solutions to African problems", which is rooted in Pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist thought, and associated with the aspiration of an African Renaissance (Ani 2019; Glas 2018; Nathan 2013). In the past decade, the drive for African solutions has maintained momentum in the context of Western interventions in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and Mali, which fuelled anti-imperialist sentiments, and the contemporary intellectual decolonial movement (Abatan and Spies 2016; Kasaija 2013; Karbo and Murithi 2018; Yohannes and Gebresenbet 2021). Whether the APSA, indeed, produces African solutions that reflect African norms, serve African interests, prove viable to resolve conflicts and are distinctive from Western approaches, is debated in research literature.

Regarding norms, Franke and Gänzle (2012) argue that the institutional development of the APSA is, in fact, guided by Western norms, ideas and templates for regional integration. Nash (2021, 14–16), meanwhile, illustrates that AU norms are not a result of international pressure. Much rather, the architects of the AU and its predecessor, the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), adopted norms that helped to shape regional interests and values. Key OAU and AU norms, such as national sovereignty, non-interference, the right to intervene, anti-imperialism, peaceful conflict resolution, and non-tolerance of coups, were adopted as a result of historical key events and the influence of African leaders.

Regarding interests, studies on African solutions question whether APSA interventions address African and European problems and permit Western governments to shed the responsibility for risky and costly conflict interventions to African organisations (Galbreath 2011; Karssen 2019; Williams 2008). Donor dependency to finance APSA structures and interventions raise concerns over the AU and REC's control over their security agenda (Cawthra 2013; Engel 2018b; Staeger and Gwatiwa 2020). Close ties between China and African organisations, meanwhile, may lower the influence of Western donors on the APSA's features and priorities (Van Hoeymissen 2011).

Regarding the viability of African solutions, the ability of the AU and RECs to deliver effective conflict responses in being questioned for reasons including limited organisational, financial and military capabilities; a lack of common values and disunity among African states over crisis responses; solidarity among authoritarian regimes that prevent interventions; and global geopolitics that obstruct the emergence of African security communities (Aeby 2019; Coleman 2011; Franke and Gänzle 2012; Gardachew 2020; Gebrewold 2010; Kasaija 2013; Nathan 2012; 2013; Williams 2008; 2014). Whereas periodic APSA reviews show incremental, non-linear progress in the capacity of APSA institutions, the peacemaking interventions by the AU and RECs produce mixed outcomes (AU 2010a; IPSS 2019; 2020; Karbo and Murithi 2018b; Murithi 2012; Nathan, Ndiaye, and Zoubir 2015). Ten of the thirteen peace agreements the AU and RECs facilitated in 2018 collapsed within a year (IPSS 2020, 42, 52).

Regarding the distinctive character of African peacemaking, components of African-led peace processes such as mediations by eminent leaders, quiet diplomacy, international contact groups, power-sharing agreements and transitions, which have been portrayed as African solutions, are hardly unique to Africa. African conflicts, however, provide the laboratory in which these mechanism and techniques are elaborated (Curtis 2007; Kagwanja 2009; Mehler 2009; Nathan 2013).

Both comparative and case studies show that African mediations enjoy greater legitimacy and acceptance by African governments than interventions by former colonial powers and other Western states, especially in contexts where anti-imperialist sentiments prevail (Aeby 2017; Duursma 2020; Khadiagala 2008; Lindenmayer and Kaye 2009). For peacemaking to succeed, it is essential that parties accept mediations as legitimate and trustworthy (Nathan 2017c; Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 320). Therefore, African organisations are well-placed to lead mediations, whilst Western development partners can provide incentives to conflict parties to strike peace deals.

AU, IGAD and SADC Policy Frameworks for Peacemaking

How African organisations envision peacemaking can be explored by examining their policies. The policy frameworks for peacemaking of the AU, IGAD and SADC is enshrined in (a) the organisations' constitutive treaties and protocols, which stipulate statutory principles for conflict interventions, (b) policy plans, which set strategic objectives, and (c) non-binding mediation guidelines, which make recommendations on the facilitation and design of peace agreements.

Mediation guidelines are not products of the organisations' bureaucracies per se, but are drafted with the assistance of experts from European and African peacebuilding NGOs, the UN Mediation Support Unit (MSU) and development partners. The guidelines that result from such partner projects have limited ownership on the part of the African organisations and do not necessarily reflect mediation practices. Their application heavily depends on whether the entailed norms correspond to those of individual mediators and political decision-makers (ACCORD 2018; Aeby 2021, 56; Lanz et al. 2017, 15; Nathan 2019a). Strategic IGAD and SADC mediation guidelines are not available to the public. The following discussion focuses on key principals for peacemaking interventions.

Respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states are central principles of the constitutive treaties and protocols of the AU, IGAD and SADC (AU 2000 Preamble; 2002 Art 4; IGAD 1996 Art 6; SADC 2001a Preamble; 2001b). The principles set a high threshold for interventions and are routinely cited by states to avoid PSC meetings on their intrastate conflicts and mediations (Badza 2020; Respondent 1 2020; Respondent 2 2020; Respondent 9 2020). In SADC, the preoccupation with national sovereignty inhibits the development of common security institutions (Van Nieuwkerk 2020; Nathan 2012, 1–25; Aeby 2019, 39).

Anti-imperialism, although not explicitly stated in the founding documents, and the Defence of the Independence of African Nations Against Outside Interference, as stated in the AU Constitutive Act, are key to the identity of the AU and SADC, which both emerged from organisations that coordinated the anti-colonial struggle and resistance against white settler regimes (AU 2000 Preamble; Karbo and Murithi 2018; Khadiagala 2012; SADC 2001b Preamble). Concerns over Western interference not only motivate African peacemaking initiatives but, in some instances, take precedent over the promotion of democracy and human rights in authoritarian states if Western powers are found to undermine the latter's sovereignty (Aeby 2017; Nathan 2012, 1–25).

The Right to Intervene in member states in response to grave circumstances, i.e., crimes against humanity, is analogous to the Responsibility to Protect and is enshrined in statutory AU and SADC documents, although absent from the Agreement Establishing the IGAD (AU 2000 Art 4; SADC 2001b Art 11; IGAD 1996). The AU and SADC also both permit the use of force. SADC, notably, envisions interventions in response to violations of both human rights and the constitutional order (AU 2002 Art 13; SADC 2001b Art 11).

The Primacy of Peaceful Means of Conflict Settlement is a statutory principle of the AU, IGAD and SADC, which all have an organisational mandate to promote peace and stability (AU 2000 Art 3; 2002 Art 4; IGAD 1996 Art 6; SADC 2001b Art 11). SADC came to prioritise peaceful over military means to manage conflict thanks to South Africa's preference for a pacifist approach (Nathan 2012, 1–25). The means of peacemaking, which the AU and SADC shall use, include good offices, preventive diplomacy, mediation, conciliation, inquiry and, for SADC, arbitration and adjudication (AU 2002 Art 6; SADC 2001b Art 11).

The IGAD Agreement (1996) did not envision such peacemaking activities and the Protocol of the Conflict Early Warning and Response Network (CEWARN), which initiated IGAD's peace and security architecture, attributed the responsibility for conflict responses to member states (IGAD 1996; 2002). Building capacity for preventive diplomacy and mediation became an objective of the Regional Strategy for peace and security (IGAD 2016, 46). An IGAD Protocol on Preventive Diplomacy and Mediation was provisionally approved in 2019, however, it has yet to be published and come into force (IGAD 2019b). It will buttress IGAD's ongoing mediation activities with legal foundations and set mediation principles, including democratic principles, that correspond to those of the AU (Respondent 14 2021).

The Principle of Subsidiarity is meant to determine whether the relevant REC, AU or UN leads a conflict response (AU 2008b Preamble; Nathan 2017b, 151). The PSC Protocol recognises the primary responsibility of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the maintenance of international peace and security, whilst also highlighting that regional organisations shall play a role in terms of the UN Charter (AU 2002 Preamble). The 2008 Protocol on the Relations between the AU and RECs and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) seek to harmonise and coordinate the activities in the field of peace and security (AU 2008b Art 30; 2008a). However, the Protocol and MoU omit whether the AU or a REC should initially address a conflict before escalating it to the PSC (Ani 2021a, 4). Deciding which organisation leads a conflict response is further complicated by the overlapping membership of the eight RECs that are APSA building blocks (AU 2014b; Porto Gomes and Engel 2013, 4). The lack of clarity has fostered competing claims to lead mediations, divergent positions on mandates and expected outcomes, and forum shopping (Nathan 2017b; Lanz 2021). A 2019 AU-REC coordination summit did not resolve the matter, but the MoU is under review (ISS 2019b).

Development and peace are closely linked by all three organisations. Providing a rationale to construct the APSA, the AU Constitutive Act and PSC Protocol highlight conflicts as principal internal obstacle to development and the “interdependence between socio-economic development and security of the peoples and states” (AU 2000 Preamble; 2002 Art 4). The development and peace nexus is reflected in AU policies including the roadmap to Silence the Guns and Agenda 2063 (AU 2016; 2015). In SADC, the Strategic Indicative Plans of the Organ on Politics Defence and Security (SIPO) of 2001-2009 and 2010-2019 aimed at safeguarding development against instability and to enable implementation of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) (SADC 2002, 17; 2010, 2; Van Nieuwkerk 2013b, 150). The RISDP 2020 – 2030 incorporates SIPO and regards peace and security as the precondition for socio-economic development (SADC 2020, 13). IGAD has the responsibility to guarantee economic security and development to minimise the vulnerability of states and strives towards a “peaceful, integrated and prosperous IGAD Region” in line with Agenda 2063 (IGAD 2016, 46; 1996 Preamble).

Democracy, human rights and peace are intimately linked in AU and SADC treaties and protocols, but democracy is absent from IGAD's constitutive documents (IGAD 1996; 2002). Reflecting a liberal peace paradigm, the AU aims to promote human rights, democracy, and good governance. It regards these principles as central to conflict prevention, collective security, stability, and peace. The PSC shall help building democratic institutions in post-conflict situations (AU 2000 Preamble; 2002 Art 4). The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance reinforces the nexus, promoting a "culture of democracy and peace" (AU 2007 Art 11-12).

The SADC Treaty, Organ Protocol and strategies equally marry liberal democratic norms with peace and security. The Organ should protect people against instability from the breakdown of the rule of law (SADC 2001a Art 11; 2002, 17; 2010). The RISDP treats good governance and democracy as conditions for peace and security (SADC 2020, 39). Finally, IGAD's peace and security strategy envisions preventive and responsive capabilities of IGAD and Member States "for enhanced good governance, democratic participation, competitive elections, and the respect of human rights" (IGAD 2016, 46).

The Non-Tolerance of Unconstitutional Changes of Government was introduced by the OAU Lomé Declaration and inscribed in the AU's Constitutive Act (OAU 2000; AU 2000 Preamble). The unequivocal policy of non-tolerance relates to military coups, the toppling of elected governments by rebels and mercenaries, and the unconstitutional retention of power by regimes that lose elections. It sets crucial parameters for mediations and agreements as the AU must suspend the member state, facilitate a speedy transition to restore the constitutional order and sanction non-compliant coup regimes (AU 2000 Art 4). To close loopholes, the Charter on Democracy and a 2010 Assembly decision ban coup perpetrators and members of interim authorities from contesting transitional elections (AU 2007 Art 25; 2010b). To prevent constitutional coups by incumbents who cling to power by scrapping term limits, the AU shall sanction constitutional amendments that violate the principles of democratic change of government. Member states must ensure that constitutional revisions repose on national consensus, if necessary, by holding a referendum (AU 2007 Art 10, 23). The AU has very consistently applied the anti-coup norm after unconstitutional changes of government (Nathan, Goertz, Graham and Aeby 2022; Nathan 2017a). In post-election stalemates, however, the AU and RECs repeatedly brokered interim power-sharing governments (Cole 2013; Vandeginste 2013). The AU did not object to popular uprisings that ousted autocratic leaders in Egypt (2011), Burkina Faso (2014) and Sudan (2019) but condemned the ensuing military takeovers (Ani 2021b, 271; AU 2013; 2014c; Nathan, Goertz, Graham and Aeby 2022).

SADC equally envisaged interventions in response to coups (SADC 2001b, para. 11). It responded vehemently to a coup in Madagascar and military interference in Lesotho but brokered a power-sharing government in the 2008 post-election stalemate and tolerated the thinly disguised 2017 coup in Zimbabwe (Aeby 2019, 57–75; Deleglise 2021; Witt 2017; 2016, 232). IGAD has no policy on coups but stood with the ousted Sudanese civilian interim authority in the 2021 coup (IGAD 2021).

The inclusion of civil society and non-dominant groups in peace processes and the participation of NGOs in organisational structures for peacemaking varies considerably between the AU, IGAD and SADC in policy and practice. Inclusion features prominently in AU policies and mediation guidelines, reflecting the international inclusive peace paradigm (Bell 2019). Local civil society actors in conflict-affected states are regarded as stakeholders whom AU mediators should consult rather than include at the negotiation table, as mediators should balance the feasibility and inclusivity of negotiations (AU 2014a, 7–10). The PSC shall involve civil society in early warning and peace-making (AU 2002, 16, 20). Restrictive rules for CSOs to engage the PSC and AU Commission (AUC) remain in place, but the PSC has adopted a flexible approach to enable partnerships with expert NGOs to develop APSA institutions (Aeby 2021, 1–7).

SADC's Organ Protocol recognises the need to cooperate with non-state actors, the SIPOs "encouraged the contribution of civil society" to conflict management, and the RISDP envisages a "structured engagement with CSOs in dispute resolution (SADC 2001b Art 10; 2002, 19; 2010, 28; 2020, 9). But SADC polices omit measures to enhance participation and SADC lacks a viable civil society interface (Aeby 2021, 46–44). As a result of different political contexts in practice, CSOs were excluded from SADC-mediated talks in Zimbabwe, consulted in Madagascar and encouraged to lead the national dialogue in Lesotho (Aeby 2016a, 712; Motsamai 2018, 150–79; Witt 2017, 24).

IGAD's CEWARN Protocol provides for civil society participation in early warning and responses on the national level, and IGAD has a poorly capacitated CSO forum. But enhancing inclusion in peacemaking is not part of the peace and security strategy (IGAD 2002 Art 9; ISS 2019a; IGAD 2016, 46). The inclusion of civil society in IGAD peace processes in Somalia and South Sudan was inconsistent. In the negotiation of the 2015 Agreement to Resolve the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS), CSOs were initially represented at the negotiation table but later treated as observers as their divisions mirrored those between the belligerents (IGAD 2019a, 18; Pring 2017, 3–7). In the negotiation of the 2018 Revitalised ARCSS, talks were expanded to include fourteen political and civil society formations (Deng 2018, 6). However, key deals were struck in closed meeting of the leaders of the main warring parties and the presidents of Sudan and Uganda who acted as peace brokers on behalf of IGAD (ICG 2019, 8).

Women's participation and gender sensitivity in peacemaking have taken hold in the AU, IGAD and SADC policies which incorporate the agenda of UN Resolution 1325. AU policies make gender equality and mainstreaming AU norms, but the agenda focuses on increasing women's representation in AU structures and peace processes rather than promoting gender equality in societies (Hendricks 2017, 93). To promote women mediators on multiple tracks and women's inclusion in peace processes, the AU created FemWise in 2017, which includes over 460 women mediators and constitutes a substructure of the Panel of the Wise (Ngandu 2017, 4; Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediators Networks 2021).

SADC's policy framework was gender-blind prior to the 2018 Regional Strategy on Women, Peace and Security. It aims at increasing women's representation among mediators, technical experts, decision-makers, staff of the Organ Directorate as well as in peace negotiations and peacebuilding mechanisms. Mediations, agreements, and peacebuilding mechanisms should become gender sensitive (SADC 2018, 38).

IGAD polices on women's peace and security establish an IGAD Women Peace Forum, but regard states and CSOs as implementation agents. States shall adopt policies and laws to increase women's participation in national peace processes, negotiations, agreements, transitional mechanisms and reconstruction programmes (IGAD 2013, 4; 2015, 29–31; 2016, 46). The impact of these policies is to be seen, and the risk that women's inclusion could legitimise peace processes that partition power between warring male elites persists. Whereas few women have led high-level APSA mediations, increasing women's participation on Track two and three is equally important (Hendricks 2021, 69, 94).

Policy norm	AU		IGAD		SADC	
	Treaty, protocol	Plans, guides	Treaty, protocol	Plans, guides	Treaty, protocol	Plans, guides
Sovereignty	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Anti-imperialism	✓				✓	
Right to intervene	✓	✓			✓	✓
Peaceful means	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Subsidiarity	✓				✓	
Development	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Democracy	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Human rights	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
No coups d'états	✓	✓			✓	✓
Civil society inclusion	✓	✓	✓			✓
Gender inclusion	✓	✓		✓		✓

The analysis excludes IGAD's Protocol on Preventive Diplomacy & Mediation, which was not in force in March 2022, and strategic IGAD and SADC mediation guidelines, which are not public.

AU, IGAD and SADC Structures for Peacemaking

AU, IGAD and SADC structures and office holders involved in peacemaking include decision-making organs, panels for peace diplomacy, mediators, mediation support structures, liaison offices and early warning systems. The functioning and interplay of these structures deviates from the systems envisioned on paper and varies greatly between organisations.

The decision-making organs of the AU, IGAD and SADC authorise and define the modalities of interventions, act as guarantors of peace agreements, and may sanction violations of international treaties and peace accords. Whilst the AU PSC has established its authority regarding peace and security on the continent, in IGAD and SADC, the summits of heads of state play a much more immediate role in managing interventions. The AUC Chair generally mandates special envoys and high representatives in consultation with the PSC, but some mediations are initiated by the rotational AU Chair and directed by the Assembly (Nathan, Ndiaye, and Zoubir 2015, 86–89; AU 2014d, 20). Having held over 1,060 meetings since 2003, the PSC has sanctioned numerous interventions, enforced the anti-coup norm and taken landmark decisions (AU 2022; De Carvalho 2017; Tim Murithi and Lulie 2012; Nathan 2017a; Kuwali 2018; Williams 2014). Yet some states persistently avoid being put on the agenda (Badza 2020; Respondent 3 2020). The council has a mandate for long-term peacebuilding but generally reacts to acute crises. Although it commonly resolves to “remain seized with the matter”, peace processes frequently disappear from the agenda after an agreement is struck (ISS 2022; Murithi 2022; AU 2002 Art 7).

In SADC, decisions for peacemaking interventions are made by the Organ Troika and Summit, which both consist of heads of states who hold frequent extraordinary meetings to give direction to mediations and implementation processes. How a crisis is handled greatly depends on which states chair the Troika and Summit respectively (Aeby 2019, 27–37; Motsamai 2018, 74–80; Van Nieuwkerk 2013a). In IGAD, conflict interventions are managed in extraordinary meetings of the Assembly of Heads of States and Council of Ministers, which plays a central role in overseeing the mediation and implementation of the 2018 Revitalised ARCSS (Hersi 2022; UN 2018, 101).

Mediators: Whereas a range of AU, IGAD and SADC office holders can fulfil mediation roles, African organisations have traditionally appointed sitting presidents as high-level mediators. Heads of States have great authority but often lack professional mediation skills, encounter conflicts of interests, and cannot undertake long-term mediation processes (Aeby 2021, 1–7; Nathan, Ndiaye, and Zoubir 2015, 86–89; Khadiagala 2008, 12). The organisations, moreover, often mandate eminent elder statesmen and few women, who bring extensive experience, to lead mediations. The selection of mediators, who should be acceptable to conflict parties, is political and opaque (Murithi 2022; Nathan 2019a; Respondent 1 2020; Respondent 9 2020).

In the AU, High-Representatives of the AUC Chair have a robust mediation mandate. Special Envoys, Special Representatives, the AUC Chair, ad-hoc Committees and the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security can also take on a mediation role (De Carvalho 2017, 6). AU Liaison Offices play a key role in supporting mediations and ensuring a steady presence during protracted peace processes (Aeby 2021, 27; Respondent 1 2020).

SADC high-level mediations are frequently led by incumbent Heads of State; in most instances this is the South African President as in Lesotho, eSwatini and Zimbabwe (Aeby 2019, 5–13; Louw-Vaudran and Chikohomero 2021). Former Heads of State, such as Joaquim Chissano, have led long-term facilitations including the implementation of agreements (Aeby 2017; Witt 2017). The chairs of the Troika and Summit may act as mediators in pressing situations and to add authority (Aeby 2017, 276; 2019, 69).

IGAD established Offices of Special Envoys for South Sudan, Somalia and Sudan, who conduct mediations with the support of special advisors of the IGAD Secretariat. The Executive Secretary may offer his good offices and IGAD has a roster for mediators and technical experts from member states for preventive diplomacy (Hersi 2022; UN 2018, 104). In practice, the roster is rarely used and diplomatic interventions by IGAD member states, who have divergent approaches and interests, are central to managing conflicts as in South Sudan (Bereketeab 2017b; Nathan 2019a).

Standing panels for peace diplomacy consist of eminent African personalities and were created as an African solution, which reflects indigenous conflict resolution approaches and the high regard for elders in African cultures (Gomes Porto and Ngandu 2015, 11, 27). The panels of the AU and RECs were inspired by the Council of the Wise of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which was reconstituted in 2021 after being idle for over five years (Odigie 2019; ECOWAS 2021). Following its creation in 2007, the AU Panel of the Wise undertook preventive and fact-finding missions focusing on elections (Gomes Porto and Ngandu 2014, 185). Whereas the PSC Protocol permits the Panel to independently undertake prevention and peacemaking activities, in practice, its mandate has been curtailed to advising the PSC and excludes mediation (AU 2008b Art 11; Nathan 2005, 1; Murithi 2022). The Panel could, in principle, facilitate dialogue during long implementation processes. However, it is underutilised by the PSC and conflict-affected states decline its good offices (Respondent 2 2020; Respondent 3 2020; Nathan, Ndiaye, and Zoubir 2015, 48–55).

The SADC Panel of Elders was appointed in 2014 to lead mediation and preventive missions (Hartman 2013, 7; Respondent 10 2020). By 2020, there was no indication that the Panel had been deployed, with the exception of follow-up missions by its chair and erstwhile mediator for Madagascar, Chissano. SADC's mediation infrastructure is underutilised as the Summit continues to entrust mediations to sitting presidents and their teams (Respondent 10 2020; Respondent 9 2020; Motsamai 2018, 88). IGAD does not have a panel of elders.

Mediation support structures were established by the AU, IGAD and SADC in the past decade to assist mediators to plan and conduct missions, provide training, manage knowledge, and network with relevant actors (Aeby 2021, 1–7; Lehmann-Larsen 2014; Lanz et al. 2017, 15). The AU MSU became operational in 2019 and fulfilled all support functions in the first year, but whether the structure would be consolidated and utilised to support mediation missions by default was to be seen (Respondent 1 2020; Respondent 2 2020).

The SADC MSU became operational in 2014, trained over 450 individuals and backstopped several diplomatic missions. However, it was downscaled in 2018 when the European Union-funded pilot project expired. A Mediation Reference Group never accompanied mediations except for its Chair who advised Chissano (Aeby 2021, 49–53). The mandate of the IGAD MSU is limited to capacity-building and knowledge-management. Therefore, the structure does not support missions (Hersi 2022; UN 2018, 104).

The early warning systems of the AU, IGAD and SADC to varying degrees contribute to mediation and preventive diplomacy. The Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) primarily serves to monitor conflict situations and issue reports to the AUC Chair (AU 2002 Art 12; Engel 2018a). It supports mediations by providing conflict analyses and building scenarios to plan missions. The CEWS does not serve as implementation monitoring mechanism but factors the implementation of agreements into risk analyses (Respondent 14 2021).

The secretive SADC Regional Early Warning Centre is staffed with intelligence operatives and focuses on state security. It neither supports mediation nor the monitoring of agreements (Kambanga 2021; Respondent 8 2019; Respondent 9 2020). CEWARN seconded staff to the Office of the Special Envoy for South Sudan to support the mediation with analytical and technical tasks. CEWARN does not monitor the implementation of the R-ARCSS, which is being observed by an IGAD ceasefire monitoring mechanism and the multilateral Revitalised Joint Monitoring and Implementation Commission (Respondent 14 2021; Respondent 15 2022).

Conclusion

The discussion of AU, IGAD and SADC policies and structures has served to explore how the African organisations envision peacemaking, how the African solutions differ from Western approaches, and to what extent the approaches are compatible.

African peacemaking interventions and the development of corresponding capabilities by the African organisations is underpinned by the desire to provide African solutions in lieu of international interventions. African organisations' policy norms were adopted by African leaders as a result of historical events (AU 2002 Preamble; Ani 2019; Nathan 2013; Nash 2021, 14–16). The key norms that shape AU, IGAD and SADC peacemaking include sovereignty and non-interference, which set a high threshold for interventions (AU 2000 Preamble; 2002 Art 4; IGAD 1996 Art 6; SADC 2001a Preamble; 2001b). Anti-imperialism is central to the identity of the AU and SADC although not being explicit in constitutive documents. In some instances, anti-imperialist solidarity takes precedent over promoting democracy if Western states are found to meddle in African nations (AU 2002 Preamble; Aeby 2017; Nathan 2012, 1–25). The AU and SADC have the right to intervene in response to gross violations of human rights and the constitutional order. All organisations prioritise peaceful means of conflict settlement (AU 2000 Art 4; SADC 2001b Art 11; IGAD 2016, 46). The application of the principle of subsidiarity remains unclear, leading to interorganisational disputes in mediations (Ani 2021a, 4; Lanz 2021; Nathan 2017b). The promoting of peace, democracy, human rights and development are closely intertwined (AU 2000 Preamble; 2002 Art 4; SADC 2020, 13; IGAD 2016, 46). The AU applies the anti-coup norm with a high consistency where governments are unconstitutionally ousted (Nathan, Goertz, Graham and Aeby 2022). In response to the unconstitutional retention of power by regimes, the AU and RECs repeatedly brokered power-sharing governments (Vandeginste 2013). AU mediation guidelines reflect the inclusive peace paradigm, but civil society actors are generally consulted in AU, IGAD and SADC mediations rather than represented at the negotiation table (Aeby 2021, 1–7; Pring 2017, 3–7). Women's participation and gender sensitivity feature prominently in policy frameworks. Whilst few women have led high-level mediations, FemWise serves to increase women's participation on all tracks (Hendricks 2017, 93; 2021, 69; IGAD 2015; Ngandu 2017).

The AU, IGAD and SADC have elaborated structures for peacemaking whose capacity, consolidation and interplay varies. The PSC has established its authority but generally reacts to acute crises and lacks the attention-span to accompany lengthy peace agreement implementation processes (ISS 2022; Tim Murithi 2022; Williams 2014). In IGAD and SADC, Heads of States remain the primary decision-makers in interventions (Aeby 2019, 27–37; Motsamai 2018, 78–80; Hersi 2022). AU and SADC high-level mediations continued to be either led by presidents, who lack technical skills and time for long-term mediations, or experienced elder statesmen whose selection is opaque (Tim Murithi 2022; Nathan 2019a; Respondent 1 2020; Respondent 9 2020). IGAD entrusts Special Envoys with mediations, but interventions by member states are key to managing conflict (Bereketeab 2017b). Standing panels of eminent African elders are greatly underutilised for mediation (Murithi 2022; Respondent 3 2020; Respondent 9 2020). Whilst the new AU MSU must make its involvement in mediations automatic, the IGAD and SADC MSUs are mostly used for training (Aeby 2021, 1–7; Hersi 2022). The AU and IGAD early warning systems support mediations with analyses, whilst SADC's intelligence-focused system is unfit to support peace diplomacy (Respondent 9 2020; Respondent 14 2021; Respondent 15 2022). The interventions which these peacemaking infrastructures produce lead to mixed outcomes as APSA-facilitated peace agreements frequently collapse. (IPSS 2019, 22; 2020, 42,52) However, peace processes commonly collapse for reasons that are beyond the control of both African and international peacemakers.

The review of the policy frameworks illustrates that peacemaking by African organisations and western state actors is underpinned by a catalogue of common norms, including the Responsibility to Protect and the primacy of peaceful conflict resolution. AU, IGAD and SADC policies squarely reflect a liberal peacebuilding paradigm whilst emphasising the need for social and economic development to attain lasting peace. The organisations' women, peace and security agendas are designed to effectuate UNSC Resolution 1325. AU mediation guidelines reflect the inclusive peace paradigm, which is prevalent in Western research and enshrined in the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 16 that aims at building "inclusive societies" (AU 2014a, 7–10; Bell 2019; UN 2015). Inclusion is a less prominent norm in IGAD and SADC policies and its application varies in mediations (Aeby 2021, 44–50; Pring 2017).

A potential friction point between the normative imperatives of Western states and African organisations results from the anti-imperialist ethos of African organisations such as the AU and SADC, which emerged from the anti-colonial struggle, as well as African nations governed by erstwhile liberation movements, especially in Southern Africa where the struggle against white minority regimes continued until the end of Apartheid (AU 2008b; Bereketeab 2017a; Nathan 2012, 1–25; SADC 2001a Preamble; Southall 2013). Owing to the sensitivity of these African organisations and states to Western interference in African nations, peacemaking interventions by African organisations are more likely to be accepted by African governments (Aeby 2017; Duursma 2020; Khadiagala 2008). Ideally, Western development partners support African-led mediations by lending them political support that is based on common democratic values and development objectives, and by offering conflict parties incentives to commit to negotiated settlements.

The discussed AU, IGAD and SADC structures and systems for peacemaking, on the one hand, reflect the entrenched traditional practices of presidential mediations and peace diplomacy by eminent African elders. On the other hand, the peace and security architectures have come to include mediation support structures that emulate the UN MSU and are informed by international technical standards. The sustainability of these mediation support structures, which were designed by international consultants as part of donor-funded projects, is to be seen given that the organisations continue to entrust presidents with mediation missions without involving MSUs (Aeby 2021, 56–59; Nathan 2019b; Van Nieuwkerk 2020).

In sum, the peacemaking approaches of African organisations and Western states are highly compatible thanks to shared democratic and pacifist values and developmental goals. As African-led mediations enjoy greater legitimacy and acceptance, Western development partners, ideally, lend political support to APSA mediations and provide incentives to conflict parties to enter negotiated settlements.

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Respondent 3. 2020. 23 January. AU official, Addis Ababa.
Respondent 8. 2019. 16 April. Former SADC official, Cape Town.
Respondent 9. 2020. 29 January. Former SADC official, Addis Ababa.
Respondent 10. 2020. 14 January. SADC official, Gaborone.
Respondent 14. 2021. 5 November. IGAD official. Video call.
Respondent 15. 2022. 15 March. IGAD official. Video call.

About Us

PeaceRep is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

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University of Edinburgh, School of Law, Old College,
South Bridge, EH8 9YL

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