

# **The African Union (Au) and the Challenges of Conflict Resolution in Africa**

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## **Abstract**

It has been contended in this study that the methodology of bringing to the barest minimum, the number of violent conflict situations in Africa, is at the core of the challenges facing the African Union (AU). We illustrated that despite the forthright initiatives of the AU in conflict resolution, incidents of violent conflicts have persisted in Africa. The general objective of the study was to examine the effectiveness of the African Union in conflict resolution, in Africa. The two complementary theories of power and realism were used as theoretical framework for the study. The role of the international community in conflict resolution in Africa was tangentially highlighted. The documentary research design has been used for the study. The findings of the study are in the following regard: that the African Union has indeed put in commendable mediatory efforts into resolving political disputes and reducing the number of violent conflicts in Africa.; that for the African Union to be truly effective in conflict resolution, it must be able to make the member states comply with AU's decisions; that the AU has to critically develop the resolve to solve problems and that the African Union has a built-in ability to become an efficient player in conflict resolution in Africa but faces extensive challenges which can only be overcome with extensive external support. The study finally came to the conclusion that the greatest challenge of the AU in conflict resolution in Africa, is to prove that Africans are capable of resolving African problems.

**Keywords:** African, Union, Conflict, Resolution, Challenges.

## **Introduction**

The methodology of bringing to the barest minimum, the number of violent conflict situations in Africa, is at the core of the challenges facing the African Union (AU). According to Egena (2011:19), the avalanche of violent crises in the African continent has made the region very volatile and depicts an environment where violent conflict has been institutionalized. The African Union, which is the successor-body to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), was born in 2001 (Mathiasen, 2006). Prior to the birth of the AU, the OAU in its declarations acknowledged that the scourge of conflicts must be controlled, for socio-economic progress to be made in Africa but failed to actualize such desirable control. For instance, the OAU declaration, establishing a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, had admitted that: no single internal factor has contributed more to the present socio-economic problems in the continent than the scourge of conflict in and among African countries. They have brought about death and human suffering, engendered hate and divided nations and families. Conflicts have forced millions of African people into a drifting life as refugees and displaced persons, deprived of their means of livelihood, human dignity and hope. Conflicts have gobbled-up scarce resources, and undermined the ability of African countries to address the many competing needs of Africans.

After reaffirming a commitment to work in concert in search of speedy and peaceful resolution of all the conflicts in Africa, the Cairo Declaration, (as the document was also called), further stipulated as follows: the Mechanism will be guided by the objectives and principles of the OAU Charter; in particular, the sovereign equality of member states, non-interference in the internal affairs of states, the respect of the sovereign and territorial integrity of member states, their inalienable right to independent existence, the peaceful settlement of disputes as well as the inviolability of borders inherited from colonialism. It will also function on the basis of the consent and cooperation of the parties to a conflict. This document/declaration and its zero-sum plans remained only declarations; as the African Union, subsequently succeeded the OAU.

The AU came into existence, when the African space had already become notorious for conflicts (Mathiasen, 2006). Therefore, conflict resolution is expected to be a major challenge to the Union. The AU has given some indications that it can do better than the defunct OAU. Where peaceful resolution had failed, the AU had resorted to military intervention. The AU's first military intervention in a member state was the May 2003 deployment of a peacekeeping force of soldiers from South Africa, Ethiopia, and Mozambique to Burundi, to oversee the implementation of the various agreements. AU troops were also deployed in Sudan for peacekeeping in the Darfur conflict, before the mission was handed over to the United Nations on 1 January 2008. The AU has also sent a peacekeeping mission to Somalia (Williams, 2011:15). Furthermore, one of the objectives of the AU is to promote peace, security, and stability on the continent. Among its principles is "peaceful resolution of conflicts among member states of the Union, through such appropriate means as may be decided upon by the Assembly". The primary body charged with implementing these objectives and principles is the Peace and Security Council. The PSC has the power, among other things, to authorize peace support-missions, to impose sanctions in case of unconstitutional change of government and to "take initiatives and actions it deems appropriate" in response to potential or actual conflicts. The PSC is a decision-making body in its own right and its decisions are binding on member states (Article 4(e) of the Constitutive Act).

Since it first met in 2004, the PSC has been active in relation to the crises in Darfur, Comoros, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire and other countries. It has adopted resolutions creating the AU peacekeeping operations in Somalia and Darfur, and imposed sanctions against persons undermining peace and security, (such as

travel bans and asset freezes against the leaders of the rebellion in Comoros). The council is in the process of overseeing the establishment of a “standby force” to serve as a permanent African peacekeeping force. (Cilliers, 2008:1).

Despite the forthright initiatives of the AU in conflict resolution, incidents of violent conflicts have persisted in Africa. In January, 2011, a wave of such conflicts, emanating from uprising against sit-tight and despotic leaders, started covering North Africa and the Middle East, from Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt to Libya.

The general objective of the study is to examine the effectiveness of the African Union in conflict resolution, in Africa. The specific objectives of the study are to: (i) find out the nature of the measures that the African Union has taken towards resolving political conflicts in Africa and (ii) ascertain what the African Union must do for the Union to remain effective in African conflict resolution.

It is intended that the outcome of this study will help to stimulate further debate in the area of conflict resolution in Africa. In addition to the above, the study will generate debate, with regards to the relevance of the AU, in conflict resolution in Africa. This is against the background of the verdict of irrelevance, seemingly given to the defunct O.A.U and some suggestions to the effect that the AU has not been significantly active in the resolution of African crisis.

At the empirical level, findings of the study will lead to quicker resolution of political conflicts in Africa and thereby prevent an imminent increase in the number of such conflicts. Findings of the study will therefore be useful in the re-positioning of the African Union (AU), for optimal performance in conflict resolution. In addition to the foregoing, findings of the study will be useful to the political elite in Africa, in instituting best practices in their policies and politics, as it is the absence of such progressive political practices that bring about violent political conflicts. African and non-African leaders, at other non-political levels, will also find beneficial, the findings of the study, as issues of conflict resolution cut across leadership spheres.

It is natural in a study of this nature for the work to face some constraints or problems. These constraints or problems constitute limitations to the work. This study is no exception. In this regard, a particular limitation had to do with the researcher’s inability to employ the interview method of data collection for the study: Findings of the study would have been enriched by the interview method of data collection, whereby key actors in AU’s affairs would have shared their experiences in conflict resolution in Africa with the researcher. To make up for this constraint, the researcher made use of the interview content of the materials employed in the documentary study that has been undertaken. Despite this limitation, the data obtained and findings of the study are considered valid and reliable.

### **The General Nature of Conflicts and The Specific Nature of African Conflicts**

Dahrendorf (1959), cited in Wasburn (1982:83) has posited that in every social organization, including total societies, there are some positions with the right to exercise control over others and this differential distribution of authority becomes the determining factor of politically significant social conflict. And to also demonstrate that conflict pervades human existence, Ball and Peters (2000:27-28), have illustrated as follows: two children in a nursery with one toy which both want at the same time, present a political situation. There is conflict and there is the need to resolve the conflict. To further demonstrate the connectivity of conflicts with political situations, Ball and Peters (2000:28) opine that although the possibilities of resolution of conflicts are numerous, the essence of a political situation remains that of conflict and the resolution of that conflict. Halebsky (1976:95) has also maintained that society is importantly, though not exclusively characterized by relations of

conflict. Furthermore on the inevitability of conflicts, Ball and Peters (2000:34) have posited that the propaganda myths that propose the end of conflict, with the realization of certain social and economic changes, should not be accepted as the actual creation of a conflict-free society.

On causes of conflict, Ball and Peters (2003:31) are of the opinion that the diversity that gives rise to conflict need not have an objective base such as economic or racial differences. They at the same time recognize that all differences are not sources of conflict at public level because; the differences between tall men and short men do not give rise to political conflict. On his part, Halebsky (1976:101) has among other factors opined that racial, ethnic, linguistic, and other cultural traits are frequent sources of group differences and conflict. However, it appears as if self-interest is at the root of all conflicts. Thus, the self-interest games that manifest in Africa and indeed elsewhere as conflicts are beginning to dovetail into intractable issues.

In Africa, research findings and conclusions, (Munya, 1999), have shown that Africa has never experienced a lasting peace. Peace and stability proved elusive in pre-colonial and colonial Africa. The scourges of the slave trade, inter-tribal warfare and the imposition of colonialism did not allow it. Thus, continues (Munya, 1999), one would expect emancipation and independence to have created an era of stability and relative peace. Instead, post-colonial Africa has experienced conflicts of a scale and magnitude heretofore un-witnessed. Pre-colonial Africa may have been volatile but the rudimentary nature of the weapons and the unsophisticated organizational structure of the societies made conflicts disruptive and adventurous rather than catastrophic (Munya, 1999). The emergence of an artificially constructed modern state apparatus and weaponry, coupled with the pressure of external forces, has therefore made Africa one of the most unstable regions in the world and has made creation of peace prospects a daunting task. (Munya, 1999). The nature of African conflicts thus becomes attributable to what Kamrava (1993:139) sees as discontinuities and lack of coherence in the political culture of most Third World Countries. Fundamental political principles are never agreed upon and thus major differences in political orientations and beliefs continue to persist. Under such circumstances, parochial loyalties maintain supremacy over national ones, often to the extent that the central government is unable to gain widespread popular legitimacy. There is also lack of widely accepted and operative civil procedures for goal attainment and conflict management, thus increasing the likelihood of political violence, un-reconciled conflicts and repressive politics. (Kamarava, 1993:139). According to Oche (2006:1), although conflicts are taken to be an inherent aspect of human relations, whether at the group, national or international levels, the prevalence of conflicts on the African continent in contemporary times has assumed the dimension of a scourge, indeed so serious an issue has the problem become, that it is arguably the greatest impediment to any meaningful form of development on the African continent today. According to Ndioho (2010:1), Africa has been characterized by many conflict situations that have resulted in the loss of millions of lives, widespread displacement and a wide array of human rights abuses. Today, Africa accounts for about 70 percent of United Nation's peacekeeping operations...Africa continues to suffer from violent conflicts. In Somalia, in Sudan's Dafur Region, in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the toll has been devastating. There, scarce resources are diverted to buying arms. Insecurity, displacement, and destruction follow (Ndioho, 2010:1).

During the 1990s, narrates Skard (2003:21), there were 18 civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa. Each conflict is different. But in all cases, the civilian population became directly involved in a different way. In the past, there were very few civilian casualties. Now, they amount to 90 percent, of which at least half are children. Civilians are not only caught in unexpected crossfire, women and children have become important targets for warring groups.

Maiming, rape, and massacres have become part of war tactics. Nobody is spared or protected. Nothing is held sacred. The war in Sierra Leone became notorious for its brutality, and children suffered on an unprecedented scale. Nobody knows exactly how many people were killed. Estimates start at 40,000 and go upwards. Around one-half or perhaps two-thirds of the population were displaced. Sexual violence against girls and women were extremely widespread. In addition, mutilation became systematic. To terrorize the population, people's arms and legs were "amputated"- cut off without anesthesia, sometimes with blunt machetes (Large Knives). Many died. The others formed a new group of invalids, the 'useless', who had special needs for assistance (Skard, 2003:21)). It then became a characteristic of African war that children suffer most. And in the estimated two million children that were killed in wars globally, during the decade (Skard, 2003), most of them died in Africa. And to further demonstrate the nature of African conflicts, Skard (2003:21) illustrates with the traumatic experience of a nine-year old girl from Liberia who relates as follows: I saw 10 to 20 people shot, mostly old people who couldn't walk fast. They shot my uncle in the head and killed him. They made my father take his brains out and throw them into some water nearby. Then they made my father undress and have an affair with a decaying body. They raped my cousin who was a little girl of nine years.

Furthermore on the nature of African conflicts, Mathiasen (2006:1) has posited that: African conflicts are spread all over the continent and there are no regions without conflicts. The nature of African conflicts therefore creates the need for capabilities for peace support operations. The nature of African conflicts shows that efficient resolution of conflicts in Africa requires that the African Union has the authority to intervene in international, transnational and intrastate conflicts; authority both in terms of formal authority and acceptability by member-states. And at the organizational and decision making level, it must be able to make the member states comply with decisions. Above all, the AU has to develop the resolve to solve problems (Mathiasen, 2006:4). The crux of the matter however, is that the African Union faces a number of organizational, decision making and military challenges as well as challenges of providing adequate funds for resource build-up and expansion (Mathiasen, 2006), required for such peace-support operations.

### **The African Union and Conflict Resolution - An Assessment**

According to Brian-Vincent and Dauda (2011:72), the AU was established in order to respond to the problem of conflicts in the African continent. When African leaders adopted the AU Act in 2000, they were crucially conscious of the fact that the scourge of conflicts in Africa constitutes a major impediment to the socioeconomic development of the continent and of the need to promote peace, security, and stability as a prerequisite for the implementation of a development and integration agenda (Brian-Vincent and Dauda, 2011:72). Consequently, the Act sets out as some of its objectives, promotion of peace and security, and stability on the continent, and establishment of the necessary conditions that would enable the continent to play its rightful role in the global economy and in international negotiations (Brian-Vincent and Dauda,2011:72). These objectives are supported by principles including the establishment of a common defence policy for the African continent; the peaceful resolution of conflicts among member states of the union through such appropriate means as may be decided upon by the Assembly and; the prohibition of the use of force or threat to use force among member states of the union, peaceful co-existence of member states and their right to live in peace and security; the right of member states to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security (Ceuppens, 2006, cited in Brian-Vincent and Dauda,2011:72). Subsequently, the African Union's evolving role in Peace Operations have been witnessed in Burundi, The Sudan, Somalia, etc (Murithi,2007).

Rugunda (2010), quoted in Ndiho (2010:1) has declared that about 20 years ago there were about 20 wars going on simultaneously in Africa but as he spoke there were only four going on and this was a very significant improvement from about 20 to four. Ambassador Ruhakana Rugunda, Uganda's Permanent Representative to the UN at the time and former President of the Security Council, attributed this development to the efforts of the AU. Let this be as it may.

### **The Role of the International Community**

Onya (2000:72) has submitted that since after the end of the Second World War, how to maintain peace in the world has caused the United Nations much money and lives of people who were engaged in one way or the other in peacekeeping operations, in different parts of the world. Ndiho (2010) asserted that Africa accounted for about 70 per cent of United Nations Peace Keeping Operations. Down the African continent, Onya (2000:72) further declares: most countries have constantly been crisis-ridden. Peace-keeping forces therefore, have become useful to the international community in maintaining global peace and security. Alger (1975), quoted in Obasi (2008:17), has described these peace-keeping forces as useful invention in the global system, while on his part, Huseynov (2008:2) has on the increasing role of the international community in conflict resolution, demonstrated as follows: Increasingly, the international community finds itself in a situation when it is the sole political actor able to stop the violence or break up the deadlock and push further the peace process when local actors are unwilling or unable to reach an agreement. This is precisely where the African Union (as symbol of the international community in Africa) can come in, to play a critical role in conflict resolution, as the umbrella regional international organization in Africa. Interestingly, the Constitutive Act of the African Union, in its preamble, declares as follows: Conscious of the fact that the scourge of conflicts in Africa constitutes a major impediment to the socio-economic development of the continent and of the need to promote peace, security and stability as a prerequisite for the implementation of our development and integration agenda... However, the critical issue has to do with the practical side of this consciousness of AU's founding fathers, as Mathiasen (2006:4) contends that the African Union has to develop the resolve to solve problems. In the meantime, the international community continues to take the lead in the resolution of African problems

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study embodies a combination of two theories - the two complementary (if not synonymous) theories of power and realism According to Roskin (1994:1) these theories can trace their roots back to the pessimistic realism of Machiavelli in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In any case, the man who more than any other, propagated the twin theories of power and realism was the German scholar, Hans Morgenthau (1904-80). Bringing the wisdom of Machiavelli and Clausewitz with him, Morgenthau contended that international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power (Roskin, 1994:3). Recently however, Green (2001) has taken the power pontifications, to unprecedented heights. He for instance, admonishes us in his law number two: if you have no enemies, find a way to make them. In law number fifteen, he admonishes that enemies should be crushed totally, to avoid a situation whereby the enemy defeated half-way, recovers and seeks revenge. In the process, posits Asobie (2007:3), power (read force or violence) is needed and used primarily for consolidating and expanding power; the end of power is power and the means to power is power itself. Every other thing or purpose is secondary. State power is thus all about acquiring the monopoly of the use of the instruments of violence within a particular community (Asobie, 2007:3). Conceiving politics in this manner implies the valorization of power, an acceptance of the view that might is right and makes the realist perspective a war-

prone conception of politics (Asobie, 2007:13). It is this realist perspective to politics that breeds political instability and violent conflicts in Africa.

### **Research Methodology**

The research design of this study is the documentary research design. The method of data collection is accordingly the documentary method of data collection. Both published and unpublished materials were utilized. Such materials had to do with the activities of international organizations; such as the United Nations (UN), the defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU) and of course, the African Union (AU); particularly as such activities relate to conflict resolution. These materials, which included newspapers and unpublished academic works, were mainly sourced from public libraries. Internet sources, which in some instances also included official documents that were available on the internet and various speeches and interviews that are relevant to the study, as also available on the internet, were utilized for the study. Our method of data analysis, entailed the examination of collected data, to review and analyze trends, problems and prospects. On the basis of the analyses of such trends, problems and prospects, findings of the study were arrived at and recommendations and conclusion, thereafter made.

### **Findings and the Way Forward**

Findings of the study are in consonance with the positions of Mathiasen (2006) and Ndiho (2010) as follows:

- i. The African Union has indeed put in commendable mediatory efforts into resolving political disputes and reducing the number of violent conflicts in Africa.
- ii. For the African Union to be truly effective in conflict resolution, it must be able to make the member states comply with AU's decisions.
- iii. The AU has to develop the resolve to solve problems.
- iv. The African Union has a built-in ability to become an efficient player in conflict resolution in Africa but faces extensive challenges which can only be overcome with extensive external support

It is indeed highly unfortunate that it is beginning to appear as if Africa is incapable of producing model political leaders. According to Igwe (2010:120), the fact that besides Nelson Mandela, no African leader bears any rating as a model whose conduct and examples may be emulated stands out as a tall claim that leaders are yet to emerge in Africa. This is a very serious sad commentary on political leadership in Africa. African leadership has remained enamoured with the power and realist paradigms of politics. The leadership issue is interwoven with the issues of conflicts and conflict resolution. At the AU level, every rotational leader of the Union should be determined to make a leadership impact in the area of conflict resolution. The Leader of the AU should have the capacity to make things happen. He should have the capacity to bring his personal wits to bear on conflict situations and lead his brother Heads of State and Government on the path of peace and development, and on the path of sound political ideals. For the African Union to be truly effective in conflict resolution, it must be able to make the member states comply with AU's decisions.

The current political ideals in Africa still dwell rather excessively on power and force, and combatant mechanisms of conflict resolution. According to Russell (1977:9), political ideals must be based upon ideals for the individual life. The aim of politics should be to make the lives of individuals as good as possible. There is nothing for the politician to consider outside or above the various men, women and children who compose the world (Russell, 1977:9). In its conflict resolution efforts, African leaders, under the auspices of the AU should embrace this bent of political ideals. Incidentally, there is already the framework of the

African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), whose ultimate aim is the enthronement of good governance. The AU should further resolve to move the APRM from level of ordinary rhetoric to that of concrete implementation

Furthermore, we agree with Abonyi (2010:34) that AU should be able to step into conflict situations before they explode into full-fledged wars. In the event of escalation of such conflicts to violent classes, an African High Command, guided by the AU, should step in to restore normalcy to such zones. This position agrees with the views of Agena (2011:30), that the African Union should have a Standby Force with a clear mandate for peace enforcement, as various experiments at peace-keeping have never giving the Union the desired results. The Constitutive Act of the African Union has actually provided for a Standby Force (Colliers,2002:11; cited in Mathiasen, 2006:4), what has remained undone is the full operationalization of this provision. And the stand-by Force will never become a reality until the AU develops the resolve to solve problems. The specific problem that requires solution with a standby force is that, if the power paradigm of politics in Africa that escalates into violent conflicts remain unabated, that it requires an equally realist paradigm, as symbolized by a standby force, to stabilize the situation.

Finally, when Mathiasen (2006) alludes to the African Union facing extensive challenges which can only be overcome with extensive external support, its ordinarily logical meaning has to do with funding and military capabilities. This study has taken a different perspective. It is held in this study that the core of the extensive external support is for the international community to allow the AU to be responsible for conflict resolution in Africa.

### **Summary/ Conclusion**

This study has examined the pervasiveness of conflicts in human relations, the spread of such conflicts in Africa, and the role of the AU, in the resolution of such conflicts in Africa. The general objective of the study was to examine the effectiveness of the African Union in conflict resolution, in Africa. The specific objectives of the study were to: (i) find out the nature of the measures that the African Union has taken towards resolving political conflicts in Africa and (ii) ascertain what the African Union must do for the Union to remain effective in African conflict resolution. The study is considered as significant as it is topical. Violent conflicts must be reduced to the barest minimum in Africa. The literature review centered on the concept of conflict and the nature of African conflicts; the Africa Union in conflict resolution and the role(s) of the international community in conflict resolution in Africa. The study arrived at the following findings: (i) the African Union has indeed put in commendable mediatory efforts into resolving political disputes and reducing the number of violent conflicts in Africa (ii) for the African Union to be truly effective in conflict resolution, it must be able to make the member states comply with AU's decisions (iii) the AU has to develop the resolve to solve problems and (iv) the African Union has a built-in ability to become an efficient player in conflict resolution in Africa but faces extensive challenges which can only be overcome with extensive external support.

Finally, it is concluded from this study that the greatest challenge of the AU in conflict resolution in Africa, is to prove that Africans are capable of resolving African problems.

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