Conclusion

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The evolving and complex nature of conflicts in Africa continues to present the REC/Ms with an important opportunity to harness their comparative advantages (which may be related to geographical proximity, socio-cultural familiarity or shared histories) as well as the less altruistic consideration of exposure and the spillover effects of conflict from one member state to another in a particular region. In this context, the institutionalisation of mediation support cites several benefits for conflict prevention. It has the potential to promote consensus building, promote knowledge management on mediation as well as promote a standardised approach to deploying mediation missions based on specific skills and requisite capacities. The chapters in this monograph have aimed to discuss the development of the various stages of the abovementioned potential outcomes of institutionalising mediation within the RECs/M. In doing so, they have documented the transition from largely ad hoc initiatives to more structured support and in the process provided rich detail drawn from a combination of interviews and secondary analyses to flesh out what has impacted on the professionalisation of mediation support in Africa.

For various reasons, some of which relate to access to information within high-level decision-making circles, reliability of data and high staff turnover which affects institutional memory, the area of inquiry in this monograph has been largely underexplored. This is also related to a larger issue concerning the sometimes underutilisation of MSUs based on the over-reliance on Track 1 diplomacy and therefore reflects on the bottlenecks that exist within the higher levels of decision-making and engagement. The politically-charged nature of some mediation initiatives by specific RECs was reconfigured as state-led mediation (as in the cases of SADC and the EAC) and presented challenges for the overall development and role of institutional approaches to mediation. For the

MSUs, this also means that there is a risk of not fully utilising the benefits of the already established mechanisms such as PoE/W. This is of course a problem that is not limited to African institutions but is a familiar, global phenomenon which reflects the struggle in multilateral institutions of state interests versus a collective mandate.

In this context, a common recommendation was made by contributors in this monograph for a greater role of the MSUs (extended to civil society actors) in preparation, planning, and back-stopping mediation processes. The current state of function for non-state actors including civil society and local peace actors in mediation support in some of the regions indicates a relegation to 'soft' responsibilities or indirect involvement whereas, it has been well established that the direct involvement of these actors often bodes well for a context-specific and nuanced mediation intervention. Therefore, as indicated throughout the monograph, greater synergies are needed not only among the various structures within the RECs but with civil society and local actors.

Accompanying an analysis of the challenges, each of these chapters also discussed the important progress made by the different RECs in this regard. An interesting commonality across the majority of the RECs was the fact that the respective MSUs were fairly successful when it came to either intervening in election-related disputes or participating in observer missions. It therefore becomes important to understand why certain contexts offer more space for MSU involvement than others and how these conditions can be replicated to improve MSU activity in other types of interventions.

In looking ahead, the authors have offered important recommendations on how to further strengthen the inner-workings and functioning of the MSUs. An important challenge cited was the understaffing of the MSUs and a concerted effort to build capacity was emphasised. The staffing deficit is possibly related to the poor funding of the MSUs. In this regard, member states have been encouraged to financially support their institutions, some of which are substantially funded by donors outside of Africa. Increased funding from RECs member states will possibly improve agenda setting and add legitimacy to the interventions.

In addition, a valuable recommendation was made for greater collaboration between the different MSUs in cases where conflicting state(s) holds membership in different RECs. Finally, the chapters have acknowledged a need to sustain the practice of sharing experiences and lessons between different MSUs in particular, as one of the ways to promote, enhance, and increase the effective use of these mechanisms in mediation efforts.

The discussions in the monograph have provided an important starting point for the conversation on the MSUs. Opportunities for further research include the experiences of other RECs not included in this study, an extended investigation of the roles and dynamics within the PoW and PoE and lastly, to document any case studies as best practices of more integrated approaches to mediation which have involved MSUs and local peace actors.