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## **Mediating Peace in Africa: A study on the role of Mediation Support Units**

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### **Introduction**

Mediation has been central to conflict resolution in intra/inter-state conflicts in Africa and has thus far primarily been facilitated at a track-one level by the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) or by various Regional Economic Communities/Mechanisms (RECs/M). It has also included track-two level processes such as those undertaken through specific initiatives by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). As the nature of conflict in Africa continues to evolve and become more complex, threats to security have tended to extend beyond the boundaries of a single state thereby necessitating a regional response. While most RECs/M were initially established to advance regional economic development and integration, the regional dimension of most conflicts necessitated the broadening of their mandates to include conflict resolution. With the proximity to conflicts involving member states, the assumption is that the RECs are well positioned to initiate an early and more effective response. This perspective of proximity was also strengthened by growing calls to apply the complementarity and subsidiarity principles between the UN, AU and RECs when it comes to intervening in conflict situations. The main argument being that the UN ought to compliment the efforts of the AU rather than initiate its own, and that both the AU and the UN ought to do the same when it comes to the RECs, and that subsidiarity will apply if the latter is not able to immediately intervene or engage.

As a result of this realisation, so began a process whereby different RECs/M sought to sharpen their conflict resolution tools through, among others, establishing what has come to be known as Mediation Support Units

(MSUs), usually located within their Political Affairs, Conflict Prevention, Peace and Security Departments. Governed by a range of mandates and outcomes, its effectiveness lies in the promotion of inclusive processes, consensus building and establishing the foundation for the substantive elements of peace agreements. Today, almost all the RECs/M in Africa have established MSUs, with the requisite staff and officials tasked with laying the groundwork for strengthening, professionalising, and institutionalising that particular RECs' mediation efforts and capabilities.

Against this background, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) has brought together a range of perspectives from leading scholars and practitioners to carefully document and analyse the role of the RECs/Ms' institutionalised approaches to mediating peace in Africa. In particular, this monograph also aims to critically examine the successes, limitations and challenges that have been experienced by RECs in operationalising the institutions, and structures created for the purpose of engaging in mediation. In an effort to resemble geographical representation, this edited monograph contains chapters which reflect on the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The perspectives presented here represent a combination of practitioner-academics within the abovementioned RECs and independent academics established in this thematic area. This methodological option purposively provides readers with 'insider accounts' balanced with informed perspectives 'from a distance'.

The chapter on 'Conflict mediation in southern Africa and the evolution of institutionalised mediation support' by Dr Dimpho Deleglise draws on interview material to analyse the dynamics of mediation support in selected SADC conflicts. It offers insight into possible tension between technical mediation support and member state-driven mediation missions. The chapter on 'The Mediation Support Unit (MSU) of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD): Prospects and Challenges' by

Prof. Kasaija Apuuli provides readers with a detailed account of the origins and functioning of the MSU. Substantiated by interview material, it appraises the use of the MSU in the region where IGAD has had several opportunities for intervention. The chapter on the 'Institutionalisation of Mediation Support within the COMESA Peace and Security Architecture' by Dr Tunji Namaiko and Dr Oita Etyang reflects on how Africa's largest regional economic bloc has structured its mediation support. Drawing on primary and secondary data, it evaluates the mediation efforts and interventions in the region. In particular, it highlights an interesting discussion on the deployment of 'Elders' in situations of conflict.

The chapter on 'Mediating Peace in Africa: Perspectives from the Economic Community of West African States' by Dr Brown Odigie examines the rationale and factors that underpin the Mediation Facilitation Division (MFD) of ECOWAS, a development necessitated by the REC's unique history with peace processes. His work also extends to describe the experiences and challenges associated with the structure. Finally, the monograph concludes with a chapter on 'Challenges and Prospects for the East African Community (EAC) by Dr Kizito Sabala which zooms in on the case study of the EAC intervention in Burundi to unpack important lessons about the EAC's approach to mediation in the region. In this chapter, the author carefully illustrates the disconnect between the institutional structures and the mediation processes.

The monograph has sought to close a gap in the body of knowledge related to mediation in Africa insofar as the operational and technical details of professionalised or institutionalised mediation is concerned. It is hoped that this collection of researched, evidence-based perspectives on institutionalised efforts at mediation will be useful to practitioners, policymakers and academics in the field of conflict resolution in Africa and beyond.