
SADC Panel of Elders as a Conflict Management and Resolution Mechanism

Tunji Namaiko and Oita Etyang

Introduction

The proliferation of inter- and intra-state conflicts at continental and regional levels in Africa has driven the emergence of mechanisms that have become important aspects of conflict prevention, management, and resolution. These architectures have become important pillars in the wider conflict prevention, management and resolution continuum and reflect the 'Africanised' effort to finding African solutions to Africa's perennial problems. Apuuli (2013) argued that the desire to provide localised African solutions rather than depend on foreign-oriented interventions is the rationale behind the establishment of such architectures. Accordingly, panels for peace diplomacy consisting of eminent African personalities/elders have been established at the continental and regional levels to undertake peace diplomacy where necessary. The use of eminent African elders reflects the indigenous conflict management and resolution approaches that are/were used and highly regarded in many African societies (Gomes Porto and Ngandu 2014:11, 27).

In traditional African societies, elders have been regarded as fountains of wisdom, which have often been associated with age and come with the responsibility to provide guidance in finding solutions to society's perennial problems. Therefore, the use of elders in a contemporary conflict context is a rendition of the traditional institution of the Council of Elders (Murithi and Mwaura, 2010:79). In this regard, the elders conducted their sessions on the basis of social issues, and cultural values, norms, beliefs and process that are understood and accepted by the community. According to Sithole (2013:119), to date, these historical practices have been replicated and applied in contemporary institutions and remain "carriers of traditional values and principles." Sithole (2013:119) noted that these structures are being replicated at the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic

Community (REC) levels and continue to play a critical role in resolving and managing inter- and intra-state conflicts, so complementing the modern state systems in the collective effort to address conflicts.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC), founded in 1992, is one of the RECs in Africa that has established a Panel of Elders (PoE). The PoE is an important institution that supports SADC's role in peace and security in the region. At the centre of conflict prevention and management, the PoE has, since its formation in 2010 by the Heads of State and Government, become an important component of SADC's approach to conflict prevention, management, and resolution. It is 14 years since the PoE was established and, accordingly, this chapter reviews and reflects on the PoE's achievements and challenges to date. It further seeks to interrogate the legal and normative frameworks, the PoE's modalities of operation, and its relationship with other SADC organs.

The functionality and efficacy of the PoE is discussed within the political and conflict context of the SADC region and its linkage with other SADC organs. The chapter further provides a holistic and more nuanced understanding of the utility of the SADC PoE in the wider context of conflict prevention, management, and resolution. In terms of methodology, the chapter used secondary literature, anecdotal evidence from SADC policy papers, and mission reports. Discussions were also held with officers from the SADC Mediation Support Unit (MSU) to supplement information obtained from secondary sources.

The chapter is organised into five broad thematic areas: Part one is the introduction that provides the foundation for the study. Part two discusses the existing conflict prevention architecture in the SADC region. Part three focuses on the PoE with a specific discussion of its structure, composition, legal and normative frameworks and modalities of operation in relationship to other SADC organs. Part four focuses on the work of the PoE in the region, while Part five provides recommendations on how the PoE's work could be strengthened in future.

The emergence and institutionalisation of the concept of the Panel of Elders

As highlighted above, the emergence of the concept of the PoE as a third-party stakeholder/actor in conflict situations has been traced to indigenous African society that often relied on elders to resolve communal conflicts/disputes. Most indigenous African societies established a functional Council of Elders to settle disputes and promote societal cohesion. The Elders “by virtue of their age were considered to be mature and experienced and could intervene and resolve conflict in order to maintain peace” (Sithole, 2013:118). It has been argued that this approach to conflict resolution and management did not consider conflict in isolation. Rather, conflict was understood in a societal context considering the cultural values, norms, beliefs and processes. Elders also considered the future implications of a conflict based on the fact that communities cherished relations among family members and by extension relationships among community members. The main goal was to find a lasting solution without prejudice and without jeopardising community cohesion. For these reasons, people always complied with the elders’ decisions, and those who disagreed were always banished from the society in order to preserve the ‘commonwealth.’

Discussed critically, one can argue that elders in most African societies favoured restorative justice – a problem-solving approach that sought to repair and restore ties, promote reconciliation, and rebuild kinship connections between those in dispute. According to Sithole (2013:119), this was momentous and transformational as it helped parties to eliminate residues of anger and hate while establishing a conducive social environment for forgiveness and empathy, which was therapeutic in helping the disputants to get over the conflict and coexist peacefully. In some cases, the respect accorded to the elders acted as a conflict deterrent. This is not to say that all disputes mediated by the elders were resolved and settled without issues. Some of these structures were accused of being complex and expensive to use, while others were condemned for being biased and unfair in their adjudication (Buszka, 2019:165).

This approach to conflict management and resolution continues to gain traction in contemporary African societies. Anecdotal examples of where

this approach continues to thrive abound in many African societies. One such example is the role of *Bashingantahe* in Burundi, which remains part of the traditional legal system in the country. *Bashingantahe* embody universal values and uphold personal integrity. They are considered to be the wise men who glue[d] the society together. In earlier times, the wise men played many roles including reconciling individuals and families, enforcing contracts, and providing guidance. *Bashingantahe* continue to be consulted on matters of land, and resettlement of refugees and displaced persons. However, their authority seems to have diminished over time. According to Dexter and Ntahombaye (2005:6), the institution of the *Bashingantahe* has become more politically inclined, such that they no longer espouse and uphold the values of impartiality, honesty, and integrity. Another example is *Abunzi* in Rwanda. Through Organic Law No 31/2006, the Rwandan government institutionalised the *Abunzi* – the local mediators in conflict management and resolution. Similar to the *gacaca* courts, the *Abunzi* use local knowledge and capacities to resolve local conflicts and disputes (Mutisi, 2012).

The above structures have largely been borrowed and superimposed on today's mediation structures. Drawing from African tradition, the AU and RECs continue to use the elders as instruments of fostering peace. They have been called upon to use their experience, wisdom, and knowledge to help resolve some of the perennial challenges facing the continent and region at large. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for example, in 1999 established the Council of Elders, which later became the Council of the Wise, while the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) has the Committee of Elders. Furthermore, the East Africa Community (EAC) has also operationalised the Panel of Eminent Persons, while SADC has established the Panel of Elders.

While the utility and the value of these structures is evident, they have been modified and adopted by the AU and RECs to reflect their regional and institutional context. As a departure from the past, it is clear that the current structures of the PoE lack authority to impose sanctions of decisions on parties as they depend on the goodwill of the parties. Second, the elders do not conduct their affairs in public as before. In most cases their affairs are

conducted in boardrooms through shuttle diplomacy. Unlike in the past, the current structures have included women in their ranks to ensure gender inclusion. For instance, of the nine members of the COMESA Committee of Elders, three are women.⁵ This amplifies the emerging and recognised role that women play in conflict management and resolution in modern conflict theatres.

SADC Conflict Management and Resolution Architecture

Since its establishment in 1992, SADC has established different instruments and mechanisms used by the SADC Secretariat and the Authority of Heads of States to help defuse, manage, and resolve conflicts in the region. To guide its role in conflict prevention, management and resolution, SADC is guided by two important legal instruments: the *Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation* and the *Mutual Defence Pact*. The former instrument operationalises the SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security (the Organ). It outlines the legal safeguards for the Organ, including its objectives (Article 2), structure (Article 3), and its role in conflict prevention, management, and resolution (Article 11).

The Organ is responsible for promoting peace and security. Under Article 11(2a), it is mandated to “resolve any significant inter-state conflicts between State Parties or between State Party and Non-State Party.” This is achieved through preventive diplomacy, negotiations, reconciliation, mediation, good offices, arbitration, and adjudication by the international tribunal (see Article 11 (3a)). The Organ was established in 1996 but only became fully functional in 2001. This was mainly because of disagreements among the member states on the symbiotic structural relationship between the Organ and the other SADC structures (De Albuquerque and Wiklund, 2015). In terms of the ‘pecking order,’ the Organ is subordinate to the Summit of the Heads of State, which is the highest decision-making body of SADC. The Organ is chaired by a sitting head of state, a position that is rotated annually. It is managed by a troika of the incoming Chair, current, and outgoing Chair. The agenda and strategic direction of the Organ depend

⁵ The three women elders are Marie-Pierre Lloyd (Seychelles), Hasna Barkat Daoud (Djibouti) and Monique Andreas Esoavelomandroso (Madagascar).

largely on the interest and political acumen of the sitting Chair, which, according to De Albuquerque and Wiklund (2015), results in a lack of continuity in terms of its activities or programmes.

On the other hand, the *Mutual Defence Pact* operationalises the mechanisms of the Organ to promote mutual cooperation in defence and security matters (Article 2). In terms of conflict management and resolution, the Pact under Article 3 notes:

- a. State Parties shall, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, settle any international dispute in which they may be involved, by peaceful means, in such a manner that regional and international peace, security and justice are enhanced, and
- b. State Parties shall refrain, in their international relations, from the threat of or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the principles mentioned in paragraph 1 (see Article 3).

Besides the Organ, the SADC conflict management and resolution architecture is supported by a Regional Early Warning System (REWS), a Regional Peacekeeping Training Centre (RPTC), SADC Standby Force (SADC SF), MSU, and a PoE, which is the focus of this chapter. In terms of early warning, SADC established a Regional Early Warning Centre (REWC) in 2010. The REWC is instrumental in detecting security threats with a regional implication. It focuses mainly on two main areas: monitoring security and political affairs, and monitoring social and economic threats. The REWS is augmented by the National Early Warning Centres (NEWC) established in each of the SADC member states, mostly within the national security architecture, to ensure seamless integration with REWS. Their roles are similar to those of the REWC, albeit limited in scope. It is imperative to note that SADC member states are at different levels of operationalising NEWC, therefore delaying the full operationalisation of the REWC.

To coordinate its peace support operations (PSOs), SADC established the RPTC in 1996. The RPTC is anchored on three strategic objectives. The first is focused on enhancing the capacity of SADC and member states to manage and participate in peacekeeping and PSOs in line with regional, continental, and international standards. The second objective is focused on

planning and management of SADC peacekeeping, PSO training and missions at regional level. The final objective focuses on institutional management to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the execution of its mandate. So far, the RPTC has recorded some positives, including:

The preparation and running of all major peacekeeping exercises conducted in the region including the Blue Hungwe in Zimbabwe (1997), Blue Crane in South Africa (1999), Tanzanite in Tanzania (2002), Exercise THOKGAMO (2005) in Botswana and Ex-Golfinho in South Africa in 2009.⁶

The SADC SF⁷ is the third institutional framework that was established for conflict management and resolution in the region. The SADC SF constitutes civilian, police and military components. The SADC SF was deployed recently in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In Mozambique, the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) was deployed to support the Mozambique government in combating terrorism and violent extremism orchestrated by al-Sunnah wal-Jamaah (ASJ) in Cabo Delgado (Deleglise, 2021). In December 2023, SADC deployed a mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (SAMIDRC). The objective of this mission is to support the Government of the DRC to restore peace and security and to pacify the eastern DRC region – a region that has continued to witness a surge in conflict and instability orchestrated by negative forces. The two missions have faced challenges, including limited financial resources, limited equipment, inadequate personnel, and lack of coordination.

⁶ See SADC website <<https://www.sadc.int/services-and-centres/regional-peacekeeping-training-centre-rptc>> [Accessed 15 March 2024].

⁷ The SADC SF was established in 2007 in Zambia in tandem with the AU concept of standby force which has been cascaded and operationalised at the regional level. The establishment of the SADC SF is in line with Article 13 of the Protocol Establishing the Peace and Security Council of the AU.

SADC Panel of Elders and mediation efforts in Southern Africa

The SADC PoE is part of the mechanism for Mediation, Conflict Prevention and Preventive Diplomacy (MCPD) and, as earlier indicated, was established to promote peace, security and stability in the SADC region with technical support from the Mediation Reference Group (MRG). The mediation functions of SADC were first highlighted in the 2010 Guidelines, outlining the structure of the MCPD, and these were later revised in 2017. The PoE is an important structure for providing leadership promoting SADC's efforts and interventions in respect of mediation in the region (SADC, 2023). The PoE was established to fulfil the following functions:

- a. Lead and/or support SADC mediation processes and facilitate confidence-building measures as mandated by the Summit;
- b. Consult with the Chairperson of the Organ, with the assistance of the Executive Secretary, on preventive diplomacy and mediation initiatives in the SADC region;
- c. Ensure that SADC preventive diplomacy and mediation initiatives are pursued according to the directives of Summit;
- d. Where appropriate and with the consent of the parties concerned facilitate dialogue, negotiation or mediate the conflict;
- e. Act as interlocutors between or among parties where concern about escalating conflict exists, and facilitate dialogue and confidence building (SADC, 2017:7).

In terms of its structure and composition, the PoE is comprised of five individuals. The selection of these individuals takes into account gender parity. The members of the PoE come from diverse backgrounds in terms of training, skills, and experience. It includes high-profile personalities including heads of state, government ministers and persons of high standing in society (SADC, 2017:7). The names of the four current members

Table 1: Current Members of SADC Panel of Elders

#	Name	Country	Position	Year of Appointment
1.	Dr Jakaya Kikwete	Tanzania	Chairperson	2022
2.	Paramasivum Pillay Vyapoory	Mauritius	Vice Chairperson	2022
3.	Patrick Chinamasa	Zimbabwe	Member	2022
4.	Charles Tibone	Botswana	Member	2022

Source: Compiled by the authors.

of the SADC PoE⁸ are summarised in table 1. The fifth member is yet to join the panel.

The PoE was inactive for some time after its operationalisation in 2014. In fact, by 2020 there was no clear record of its involvement in mediation initiatives in the region besides a follow-up mission by its Chair Joaquim Chissano, who was (by then) an erstwhile mediator for Madagascar (Aeby, 2022:17). However, the tide seems to have turned recently. Since 2022, the PoE has emerged as one of the most important and responsive structures of SADC in terms of fostering preventive diplomacy in the region. With the support of the MRG and the SADC Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC), between 2022 and 2023 the PoE was deployed to at least five SADC countries as part of SADC preventive diplomacy in the context of elections in Zimbabwe, Madagascar, the DRC, Eswatini, and Lesotho.

As part of its efforts to support and guarantee peaceful elections, the PoE has several roles. Among them is leading and supporting SADC mediation efforts before, during and after elections as well as facilitating confidence-building measures in the electoral context. This function entails that with technical support from the MRG and in collaboration with the SEAC,

⁸ To be nominated as a member of the PoE, one must meet the following criteria: have experience and a high degree of competence in mediation at national, regional and/or international levels; be credible and have a high moral standing; be above the age of 50 years; be available for deployment at short notice; be acceptable to all member states; and be a citizen of a SADC member state.

it actively engages in pre-election and post-election activities in member states to map out electoral risks and formulate strategic entry points for the deployment of High-Level Preventive Diplomacy Missions (HLPDM) to facilitate peaceful electoral transitions. For instance, in 2023, Zimbabwe witnessed a disputed electoral outcome that heightened political tensions in the country due to allegations of electoral malpractices. These sentiments of unfair electoral processes were also highlighted in the report of the SADC Election Observer Mission. Following the release of the Report, SADC deployed the PoE, led by Dr Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, to calm the situation and ensure that a peaceful electoral transition was facilitated in the framework of the prescribed laws of the country.

The PoE made several proposals to the leadership in Zimbabwe and supported the proposal that there was a need for reforms in the short- and long-term as a means of promoting and consolidating democracy in Zimbabwe. Similar approaches were undertaken in the DRC, Eswatini and Lesotho, among others, with mixed outcomes. Generally, the PoE has, over the last two years, been responsive to election situations in the region and is often aligned with the processes of the SADC Electoral Observer Missions (SEOM) and the SEAC in preventing or mediating any electoral conflicts that arise.

In line with the above, the PoE is also mandated to regularly hold consultations with the Chairperson of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security with the assistance of the Executive Secretary, on issues relating to preventive diplomacy and mediation initiatives in the SADC region (SADC, 2023). This role is very important because it determines the preventive interventions that need immediate response and attention. The primary idea is to deal with any latent conflicts before they become volatile. This role is also highly supported by the early warning reports from the REWC at the SADC Secretariat and the NEWC in the member states that provide information for the PoE to act upon or respond to. The MRG also conducts prior background assessments and technical reports are submitted to the MSU and the PoE for action and decision-making (Key Informant Interview, 7 January 2024). It is in this context that the PoE, as part of the Oversight Committee, and through its Chair Jakaya Kikwete, accompanied the

President of Zambia, Hakainde Hichilema (in his capacity as the Chair of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security) to the Kingdom of Lesotho. This was to engage the leadership in order to devise better ways for supporting the smooth implementation of the reforms as part of consolidating a broader peace architecture (Key Informant Interview, 8 January 2024). In the case of Lesotho, the PoE engaged with different stakeholders including government officials and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in building consensus and implementation of a roadmap for institutional and legal reforms aimed at consolidating peace and stability in Lesotho (SADC, 2023). This engagement by the PoE, within the framework of the leadership of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, is regarded as one of its landmark achievements in terms of preventive diplomacy since its establishment, given that reforms in Lesotho are underway and gaining much traction from stakeholders.

By working with its subsidiary structure including the MRG and structures such as the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, the SEAC, and the REWC – the PoE pursues the SADC preventive diplomacy and mediation initiatives within a structured framework and must adhere to and align with the directives of the Summit. In conducting its operations, the PoE works with the consent of the parties involved and facilitates dialogue, negotiations or mediation between conflicting parties in the region. This consent and engagement with key interlocutors is very important as it can undermine the work of the PoE if not conducted properly. For example, in 2022, the then SADC Troika Chairperson announced that they were sending the PoE to Eswatini to resolve the political impasse that was threatening to escalate. However, the Kingdom of Eswatini officials were unsettled by the statement and indicated that the PoE rather be deployed to address the security issues and not the political situation in the country (News24, 2022). There were also concerns about the SADC statement as it was seen to undermine the diplomatic principles and sovereignty of the Kingdom of Eswatini. King Mswati was also against the deployment of the PoE to Eswatini. This example clearly underscores that member states' consent is paramount for any successful deployment of the PoE.

In line with its Strategic Plan (2022–2024), the SADC MSU has fully adopted and institutionalised the PoE as a mechanism for fostering peace and security in the region. The MSU was deliberate in supporting the work and initiatives of the PoE including providing more platforms for networking, sharing of experience and exchange of information among the actors. Furthermore, the MSU supported the strengthening of research, analytical and mediation skills of the PoE to improve organisational and individual competences in mediation processes. For example, in 2022, the MSU collaborated with the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) to conduct a training anchored on designing and operationalising effective mediation processes (ACCORD, 2022). The training was important as it helped the PoE and MRG to analyse critically the conflict contexts and proffer practical solutions. Following this training, the MRG was actively deployed to six countries as part of the pre-mediation missions between 2022 and 2023, this in order to map out conflict dynamics and support the design of an effective mediation process to facilitate PoE intervention.

Analysing the efficacy of the SADC Panel of Elders in conflict prevention

The PoE has encountered several constraints in executing its mandate effectively since its formation in the SADC region. Although the MSU is the structure that is mandated to be the Secretariat for various conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy activities of SADC, the absence of a fully-fledged and functional MSU at the SADC Secretariat has tremendously limited the technical support that is supposed to be given to the MRG and PoE, therefore affecting the full operationalisation of these mechanisms. As of 2023, the MSU had only one substantive mediation officer and the inadequacy of human resources remained a constraint for the unit to effectively support the MRG and PoE work (Key Informant Interview, 7 January 2024). Despite the work of the PoE being more prominent in the last three years, the MSU is technically still too weak to optimally support the activities of the PoE.

Apart from understaffing, sustainable financial capacity of the PoE to effectively carry out mediation interventions remains a concern (Key Informant Interview, 7 January 2024). Although the MSU was officially launched in 2014, its full operationalisation was greatly affected over the years due to a lack of sustainable funding, a situation that limited support for both the MRG and PoE activities (Aeby, 2021). Recently, the European Union (EU) provided financial and technical support to the MSU. For example, in 2022, they supported the development of a Strategic Plan (2022–2024) for the PoE and MRG that provided a framework for scaling up MRG/PoE activities including capacity-strengthening initiatives. The implementation of this Strategic Plan has contributed to increased deployment of the PoE in the last two years, and improvements in coordination between the MRG and PoE and other structures such as the SEAC and the REWC. In addition, there have been improved capacities through targeted training as envisaged in the Strategic Plan (Key Informant Interview, 8 January 2024).

As indicated above, since the formulation of the Strategic Plan in 2022 and its subsequent implementation, there has been improved coordination and collaboration between the MRG and PoE. However, there are still gaps, especially in terms of a lack of regular meetings, consultations, and interface (Key Informant Interview, 15 February 2024). This system-wide coordination, collaboration and inter-operability needs to be strengthened further and extended to the REWC, NEWC, the SEAC and the recently established SADC Regional Network of Women Mediators, among others. The MRG should also be facilitated to regularly gather data on potential and emerging conflicts in member states and feed it to the MSU and PoE to act accordingly. In addition, apart from Malawi and South Africa, most SADC member states have weak or no national peace policies and institutional frameworks such as National Peace Architectures (NPA) to support robust peace and security interventions. The foregoing affects effective and smooth coordination and implementation of peace and security activities by the PoE.

It is worth noting that much of the work of the PoE operates at Track 1 diplomacy. Although it deploys local elders drawn from the region, the

process is elitist and detached from grassroots processes at national level. There is no evidence to show the deployment of Track 2 diplomacy, which could broaden and increase the number of players in preventive diplomacy. Although the MRG is intended to play that role and has successfully carried out CSO engagement missions between 2022 and 2024 to a number of countries, including the DRC, Seychelles, Mauritius and Madagascar, such engagements to the rest of the region remain limited. However, the national peace processes are highly politicised and characterised by ambiguity, and therefore investing more in local peacebuilding will secure some transformational results. While less political space exists at the regional and national levels, there are more opportunities at the community level. Political settlements at the regional and national levels do not automatically translate into peace at local levels. Consequently, the interventions of the MRG and PoE are more evident at a much higher political level without making much impact at sub-national levels where conflicts occur. Therefore, conflict resolution and mediation should be designed to collaborate with local interlocutors and carry along communities who are closer to conflict situations (Barié, 2008; Porto, 2012). The MRG would be an effective structure because it brings diversity and personal connection that comes with identity and cultural connotation. Therefore, its collaboration with infrastructures for peace in member states must be emphasised and harnessed as that would act as a link to the PoE as they deal with conflicts.

The PoE has been involved in election missions and political crises. However, most of their activities and responses have been ad-hoc or reactive. More systematic preventive and response mechanisms are necessary to be able to have a continual assessment of the peace and security situation in the region. Mediation processes should not only be catalysed by a problem. Rather, there should be a well-thought-out plan to prevent conflicts and have early warning information acted upon in time – before the conflict erupts and escalates into armed or violent conflict.

Looking ahead: The SADC Panel of Elders

As alluded to earlier, elders in African communities are the custodians of indigenous knowledge, and given this experience they are well known and respected by members of the community. This observation is supported by Fiseha et al. (2011) who adds that eminent and older people in society are the source of indigenous knowledge and wisdom as they are deemed to

possess experience and a deeper understanding of the issues. These are important considerations when structuring panels of elders in formal and institutional setups. The importance of structures such as the PoE is that they recognise local settings and culture. Therefore, one can identify linkages of the conflicts to social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions and they denote African solutions to African problems.

Formalisation of the PoE structure in the organisational set-up of SADC is a progressive measure for fostering effective conflict resolution and preventive diplomacy, although its major impact is yet to be fully realised. Lack of optimal financial support for the MSU and by extension to the PoE and MRG has adversely affected the impact of the PoE as it cannot optimise its functions. This then limits its interventions in peace building. More financial support should be allocated to enable it to fulfil its mandate. The holistic operationalisation of a SADC Peace Fund to realise sustainable financing of PoE operations cannot be over-emphasised.

Member states should also be compelled to adhere to the recommendations of the PoE, and it should be given more leverage to deal with different emerging issues in member states. The PoE has a great comparative advantage in dealing with conflicts and mediation issues in the region because it includes eminent and respected persons who are experienced and qualified mediators. The structure is also supported by several normative mechanisms that help to support its work and provide a legal basis for its mandate.

Support structures such as the MSU need to be strengthened with adequate staffing and resources in order to ensure that the technical assistance provided to the PoE and MRG is optimal. There should also be continual capacity-building to ensure that the PoE and MRG are more agile and responsive to the ever dynamic and changing conflict dynamics in the region. Furthermore, there should be a focus on strengthening effective coordination of various key structures that support the work of the PoE. These include the REWC, NEWC, SEAC and the recently established SADC Regional Network of Women Mediators. The linkages and synergies among the structures should be enhanced so that the PoE can function effectively in its preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution interventions. The MSU

should draw up joint interventions and clear standard operating procedures for effective coordination and collaboration between the PoE and MRG on the one hand, and other stakeholders including CSOs and member states on the other hand. It is important to mobilise the existing Infrastructures for Peace (I4P), CSOs, academia and think tanks to forge networks and collaborative efforts that will support both the MRG and the PoE interventions. The operations of the PoE and MRG need to be synchronised and should be more structured and proactive and not ad hoc and reactive. Strong collaboration between the PoE and other similar mechanisms at the continental and regional levels is highly encouraged. This could entail organising joint briefings and field missions. 🌍

Reference list

- Aeby, M. (2021) *SADC – the Southern Arrested Development Community? Enduring challenges to peace and security in southern Africa*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Aeby, M. (2022) *How African organisations envision peacemaking: AU, IGAD and SADC policies and structures for African solutions*. Edinburgh, PeaceRep.
- Apuuli, K.P. (2013) The African Union (AU), the Libya crisis and the notion of “African solutions to African problems”. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 31 (1), pp. 117–138.
- Buszka, A.J. (2019) When alternative dispute resolution works: Lessons learned from the Bashingantahe. *Buffalo Law Review*, 67 (1), pp. 16–225.
- De Albuquerque, A.L and Wiklund, C.H. (2015) Challenges to peace and security in southern Africa: The role of SADC. *Studies in African Security* [Internet]. Available from: <https://www.foi.se/download/18.7fd35d7f166c56ebe0bb390/1542369060270/Challenges-to-Peace-and-Security-in-S-Africa_The-Role-of-SADC_FOI-Memo-5594.pdf>
- Dexter, T. and Ntahombaye, P. (2005) *The role of informal justice systems in fostering the rule of law in post-conflict situations: The case of Burundi*. Geneva, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.
- Faure, G.O. (2009) “Culture and conflict resolution.” In Bercovitch, B, Kremenyuk, V and Zartman W. eds. *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution*. SAGE Publications Ltd. pp. 506–524.
- Gomes Porto, J. and Ngandu, K.V. (2014) The African Union, preventive diplomacy, mediation, and the Panel of the Wise. *African Security*, 7, pp. 181–206.
- Non-attributable comment by SADC official on 7 January 2024. Lusaka.
- Non-attributable comment by SADC official on 8 January 2024. Lusaka.
- Non-attributable comment by SADC official on 15 February 2024. Lusaka.

- Isa, F.G. (2011) "Repairing historical injustices: Indigenous peoples in post-conflict scenarios." In Aguila, G. O and Isa, F. G .eds. *Rethinking Transitions: Equality and Social Justice in Societies Emerging from Conflict*. Intersentia. pp. 265–300.
- Murithi, T and Mwaura, C. (2010) The Panel of the Wise. In: Engel, U and Gomes Porto, J .eds. *Africa's new peace and security architecture: Promoting norms and institutionalising solutions*. Ashgate, Farnham and Burlington.
- Mutisi, M. (2012) Local conflict resolution in Rwanda: The case of Abunzi mediators. In: Mutisi, M. and Kwesi, S.G. eds. *Integrating traditional and modern conflict resolution: Experiences from selected cases in Eastern and the Horn of Africa*. Africa Dialogue Monograph Series No. 2/2012. Durban, ACCORD.
- Porto, J.G. (2012) Mediators not in the middle: Revisiting the normative dimensions of international mediation. In: Engel, Ulf ed. *New mediation practices in African conflicts, global history and international studies* 4. University of Leipzig Press. pp. 11–41.
- SADC. (2017) *SADC mediation, conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy structure. Revised guidelines*. Gaborone, SADC Secretariat.
- Sithole, A. (2013) The hatchling institutions of the African Union's peace and security architecture: The Panel of the Wise. *Journal of African Union Studies*, 2 (1 and 2), pp. 117–136.