



FBA



Conflict Prevention in the African Peace and Security Architecture

Policy and Dialogue Notes on Conflict Prevention and Mediation

The number and frequency of African led mediation and preventive diplomacy interventions have grown in the past few years. This is reflected in increased policy development. A major challenge facing the continent is the gap between early warning and early response. Other central themes during the Research and Policy Dialogue on Conflict Prevention and Mediation organized by the African Union and the Folke Bernadotte Academy at the AU Headquarter in Ethiopia was inclusive and broad participation in sustainable peace processes, the mediator's context-specific knowledge, how to facilitate flexible support for activities, sensitive border areas and how to improve coordination and division of labour between actors.

The African Union Commission in collaboration with the Folke Bernadotte Academy organized a research and policy dialogue on conflict prevention and mediation on 16 and 17 October 2018 at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The purpose was to deliberate on best practices and experiences in the areas of conflict prevention and mediation within the context of the African Peace and Security Architecture and the African Governance Architecture. The Dialogue also sought to assess the AU efforts in conflict prevention and mediation in order to identify valuable lessons that could shape the Commission's long-term peace-making interventions.



Photo: Paschal Chem-Langhee, AU

Lessons from conflict prevention and mediation

The Policy Dialogue brought together AU Member States, Regional Economic Communities, Regional Mechanism, researchers, practitioners including diplomats, policymakers and partner organizations. During the two-day Policy Dialogue, participants deliberated on various peace and conflict-related themes including Reflections on African Peacemaking Efforts, Understanding the Dynamics of African Conflict Prevention, Inclusivity in Peace Processes, Conflict Prevention and Mediation Coordination Mechanisms: Best Practices, Support for AU Peacemaking Efforts, and Reflections, Challenges and Ways Forward. The key discussion points from the sessions are presented below.

Recognized importance of African led interventions

The number and frequency of African led mediation and preventive diplomacy interventions have grown in past few years. This is also reflected in increased policy development. These interventions often take place in environments characterized by complex conflict situations and at times competition between different actors involved in conflict prevention and mediation. Successful interventions therefore require increased understanding of the operational environment.

There is also increased recognition of the importance of African led or balanced participation in interventions when conflict arises on the African continent. Some research findings were presented that

suggest that mediators from Africa are more likely to succeed in mitigating conflicts than mediators from out of the continent. This might be explained by the fact that brokering a successful peace agreement requires deep context-specific knowledge which African mediators are perceived to have. However, being seen as too close to the conflict, or even part of the conflict also poses its own challenge. In the end, the appointment of a mediator needs to be merit-based and the type of mediator that is needed should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

The AU and RECs were urged to take the lead role in peace efforts on the continent and were advised to strategically choose their peace mediators.

Importance of linking early warning and early response

A major challenge facing the African continent is the gap between early warning and early response. To overcome that challenge, AU-PSD's Conflict Prevention Early Warning Division has developed platforms to constructively and effectively engage decision-makers, both within AU and the RECs/RMs as well as Member States to promote the AU Commission's conflict prevention and mediation initiatives.

In order to reinforce the capacity of the AU Member States to strengthen that linkage, the AU has developed the Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA) and Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategies (CSVMS). These are voluntary processes that are available to the Member States to assess their structural vulnerabilities and identify mitigation strategies. The Republic of Ghana has been the pilot country to complete the first CSVRA/CSVMS. More Member States are expected to follow suit.

AU Member States are being encouraged to take greater responsibility in adopting and implementing the tools developed by the AU for their own long-term benefits and to ensure improved linkages between early warning and early response.

Borders as a structural conflict prevention tool

Specific attention was given to border areas and the importance of focusing on border areas for conflict prevention. Even though borders are poli-

tically sensitive, in particular when it comes to natural resource management, the AU has created an innovative approach to deal with the challenge of border issues in Africa. The Commission has established the AU Border Programme, which is composed of three pillars: delimitation/demarcation, cross border cooperation, and capacity building.

The Great Lakes Region was given as an example of where there is a need to reconcile the narratives of the cross-border communities by balancing the rights of said people and the sovereign prerogatives of States. It was recommended that a new border governance approach is needed and that it has to involve civil society and border populations by enhancing their capacity and resilience.

Inclusivity in peace processes

Inclusive policy agendas and broad participation, especially of women and youth, was recognized as critical in sustainable peace processes. Gender mainstreaming is also essential to conflict prevention and conflict management.

Some research has shown that a more balanced society is less likely to exhibit conflict-prone behaviour. Gender analysis is therefore imperative in conflict prevention and peacemaking, as is the goal of re-balancing societies and enabling gender parity. Including women in peace processes therefore needs to be made a priority.

Youth is another important group of individuals that need to participate in conflict prevention and mediation. Three main challenges for incorporating youth in prevention and mediation efforts were identified:

- Societies need to overcome the intergenerational barrier and create recognition of the role youth can play in fueling, maintaining or resolving a conflict. This includes overcoming the common assumption that idle and jobless youth are dangerous and should merely be recipients of job creation efforts. Such assumptions depoliticize youth and deny them the recognition of their rational decision-making capacity.
- Peace may mean very different things to different youth, across different conflict settings. Therefore, there is a need to move away from seeing "youth" as a uniform cohort, to identifying their varying roles, motivations and contributions to prevention and mediation.

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- To practically insert “youth” in political and peacemaking processes agendas without proper reflection would merely result in token representation.

Coordination and division of labour

The need for improved coordination and a clearer division of labour was a cross-cutting theme during the dialogue. In particular, the AU’s leading and coordinating role was recognised.

Lessons showed that national efforts had often not been enough to prevent conflict and that there remains a need to prioritize a regional approach to crisis. This also underscored the need for functioning coordination mechanisms amongst international and regional actors.

It was suggested that, during any given intervention, the organization with the greatest knowledge of the local conditions should be in the operational lead. With reference to existing prevention and mediation interventions by the AU, it was proposed that the AU, RECs/RMs, and the UN jointly develop a framework to outline their roles in respect to the principles of subsidiarity, complementarity and comparative advantage.

Also emphasized was the need to discuss policies, and identify synergies and best practices that relate to peacemaking efforts. Doing so will better coordinate activities and implement peacemaking efforts in an interconnected and more effective manner.

A more inclusive composition of mediation teams

The composition of a mediation team has a great impact on the results of the mediation process. The choice of mediator/s is particularly relevant.

Increased engagement with those responsible for appointing mediators is a necessary precursor in ensuring an inclusive practice of appointing mediators. Doing so will allow for the appointment of alternative types of mediators – including female mediators – that may be more effective in a mediation setting.

Mediators today are supported by a mediation team consisting of mediation and political experts

as well as thematic and admin/logistical staff. A more systematic approach to selecting these teams is required to ensure increased diversity within the mediation teams including representation of women and youth who can also play important roles in peace processes.

The importance of knowledge management

There is a need for a more systematized approach to knowledge management with regards to preventive diplomacy and mediation interventions. It was suggested that more reflection was needed on the work of AU Special Envoys, Special Representatives and the Panel of the Wise, which could be harnessed by and housed within the soon to be established AU Mediation and Support Unit (MSU). The dissemination of Lessons Learned to Special Envoys should be conducted regularly. Furthermore, structured and predictable mechanisms are needed to strengthen intra-institutional synergies and collaboration by different departments within the same organization (AU or REC), for the benefit of the overall peacemaking efforts of that organization.

Support for AU peacemaking efforts

Finally, the research and policy dialogue discussed how flexible support for the AU’s conflict prevention and mediation activities can be facilitated with particular emphasis on financial, human and technical resources. Specific attention was given to the newly reestablished Peace Fund.

Conclusion

At the end of the two-day event, it was recognized that the dialogue had created a forum for discussion and exchange of views between the research and policy community that is rare to find. It was also evident that such a dialogue contributes to evolving the thinking around what works and what does not work in conflict prevention and mediation. There is however a need to transform these discussions and the results thereof into tangible changes in the practice of conflict prevention and mediation.