

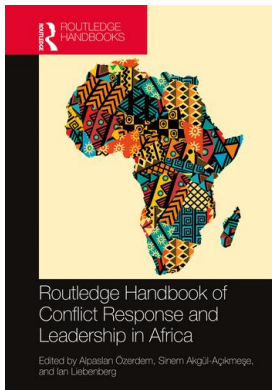
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HOW TO IMPROVE LEADERSHIP IN CONFLICT RESPONSE IN AFRICA

Lessons learned

Sinem Akgül-Açıkmeşe, Alpaslan Özerdem, and Ian Liebenberg

The *Routledge Handbook of Conflict Response and Leadership in Africa*, in its 28 chapters, profoundly examined the concept of leadership in conflict response through a macro-, meso-, and micro-lens analysis. With authors from various continents and disciplines, this edited volume sought to contribute to the ongoing debate on conflict dynamics by blending a broader theoretical understanding with practical perspectives at the macro (global/regional/national), meso (NGOs, religious groups, academics) and micro (civil society organisations, youth groups, women's organisations) levels.

The 28 chapters forming this edited volume outline and highlight common and divergent views about conflict response and leadership in Africa. We noted *ten imperative and generalized lessons* that could be drawn from those carefully designed contributions in terms of commonalities and divergences on leadership in conflict response.

First, at all levels – macro, meso, and micro – leadership arises as a vital issue in the African continent's everlasting conflicts. As charted in the book, successful and effective leadership leads to specific development contexts in many African countries in the political, economic, and societal arenas, which can, in turn, lead to a decrease in the number of conflicts and/or their intensity. The leadership–conflict nexus is thus extremely critical in conflict resolution, so much so that the leadership–conflict interconnection is multilayered and multifaceted, as observed elsewhere in Africa from Cape Agulhas in South Africa to the northernmost point of Ras Ben Sakka in Tunisia, from Ras Hafun in Somalia to the westernmost boundary in Senegal.

The **second** vital lesson drawn from the discussions on conflict resolution and leadership in Africa is the significance of great powers' shortcomings as leaders in the region. Today, it is acknowledged that neither the US nor Russia or China are willing to take up the global leadership role as the liberal international order is in a slight demise. The US, as a superpower, for instance, supported the activities as well as the peacebuilding capacities of international institutions or global governance mechanisms as a whole in the region, though it suffered serious legitimacy issues. By supporting countries specifically through arms trade, which could go against its liberal norms and values, the US eroded its credibility and legitimacy.

Similarly, China and Russia add up to the continent's conflicts through comprehensive arms deals, reflecting their greater involvement, specifically since the 1990s. Nevertheless, China's deeper engagement in the region is simultaneously through its financial, economic, and diplomatic tools as well as its public diplomacy, specifically in the COVID-19 era, all of which increase Chinese interdependency with several African states. In a similar vein, Russia counters the influence of the US and European states in Africa with its investments while undermining human development, as discussed in the relevant chapter. In other words, there is an increasing presence of China and Russia in the African continent, which bypasses the US's likely disappearance, even though this does not culminate in a fundamental leadership role in African conflict resolution processes. Overall, the influence of great powers over the African continents' conflicts is limited due to their shortcomings of capabilities and their lack of collaboration with local actors.

Third, in such a geopolitical environment, while the competition between the US and China increases at the regional scale with no branding for those as continents' leaders, middle powers might find more ground to act as leaders in the continent's specific conflict resolution activities on a limited temporality. Thus the middle powers might generate an alternative order that tackles the conflicts and the growing number of governance issues in the African continent. For instance, Turkey's actions in Somalia as an emerging middle power are significant in the post-conflict reconstruction, specifically in the Somalian case as an example of limited temporality. On the other hand, Turkey falls short in providing effective leadership in Somalia because of its close ties to the federal government and lack of contextual understanding. Accordingly, as this case also indicates, it is also a daunting task for middle powers to act in Africa.

The **fourth** lesson drawn from an overall assessment of chapters is the lack of leadership skills of intergovernmental institutions. As observed in the examples of the United Nations (UN), NATO, and the European Union (EU), as *out-of-Africa* institutions, their leadership capacity in conflict resolution has remained marginal due to their members' conflicting interests and bureaucratic problems with their decision-making and operational capabilities. As an *in-house* institution, the African Union (AU) also shares the same fate with the other intergovernmental institutions since the same interest-based approach operates within the institution. For instance, in South Sudan, the United Nations and the African Union are constrained by a simplified and lowest-common-denominator discourse on the Darfur case.

A related **fifth** lesson is about the relative progressive leadership role of regional/local intergovernmental functional institutions such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAM), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). As they focus on specific interregional issues and/or specific functions, they have more potential than outsiders to act as leaders in a particular case or context. For instance, ECOWAS blends coercive diplomacy with diplomatic efforts mostly from an economic perspective, as in Gambia's case, by pointing at ECOWAS's good governance interventions as a novel type of conflict response.

Nevertheless, as a **sixth** lesson, regional actors' collaboration in an organized manner in Africa, instead of their piecemeal individual policies and actions, would additionally be significant for conflict resolution. For example, an increased level of collaboration between NATO and the EU and their cooperation with other global institutions might result in both institutions' leadership capacity as they merge their efforts of dealing with the conflicts of Africa. As could be exemplified by the Somalian peace process, the UN's efforts should also converge with other outside actors in creating sustainable institutions and leaders in the peace processes. The SADC in Southern Africa becomes a more powerful conflict resolution actor when it acts together with the African Union. As observed in several chapters in this edited volume, particular regional

issues also present a significant opportunity for some African countries to cooperate and demonstrate effective leadership skills in resolving them. For instance, issues of maritime security and especially piracy in the Horn of Africa created a high insecurity level and hence caused the regional and international actors to cooperate to act effectively.

As a **seventh** lesson, individual leadership skills are equally essential in conflict resolution processes, as can be exemplified in Nelson Mandela's and Paul Kagame's cases in South Africa and Rwanda, respectively. The Arab revolts in North Africa also revealed the importance of national leadership. In Tunisia, the role of civil society enabled a successful transition, even though national leadership failed. On the contrary, civil society's absence and the increasing impact of the military and authoritarian politics led to one-man-rule in Egypt. Similarly, the lack of strong institutions and national identity, as well as the incapacity of individual leadership, prevented an orderly power transition in Libya.

Concerning the significant role of civil society organisations in effective conflict response, it is important to note why community-based engagement is critical for long-term sustainability. As a cross-cutting issue in most of our chapters in the meso-/micro-level conflict response, the socio-cultural appropriateness of how conflicts were transformed and peace was built was underlined repeatedly. Our contributors urged macro-level conflict response processes to make all necessary efforts to provide meaningful connections with community actors, whether they are clan or faith leaders or community-based organisations led by women or youth.

Therefore, the importance of the role of youth in conflict response and leadership in Africa is the **eighth** critical lesson that the authors highlight in this edited volume. Youth plays a significant role in conflict response if the conditions that support them are sufficient. For instance, high unemployment, low-quality education, and poor living conditions undermine youths' efforts in the South African case. Moreover, the risk of conflict increases significantly if the youths' efforts are undermined and marginalized in conflict response attempts. The collaboration between regional organizations, states, and civil society organizations is essential in the inclusion of youth in conflict resolution processes.

The **ninth** lesson drawn is related to the role of regional communities, which facilitates conflict response. As observed in several cases in Africa, the meso-level communal efforts could be enlarged to the macro level to set the ground for resolution attempts. For instance, faith leaders are also involved in peacebuilding efforts in several African countries, and they are usually involved in such capacities as faith leaders, allowing them to develop several conflict resolution skills. However, as argued in this edited volume, they need leadership skills to be involved in such resolution attempts with a better outlook.

Furthermore, the effective usage of information and communication technologies (ICTs) among those communities could enhance any attempts to resolve conflicts. Still, in local contexts, ICTs could sometimes weaken conflict response attempts because they challenge the existing hierarchies. Thus peacebuilders should take this challenge into account and link the ICTs to existing modes of operation, specifically in the case of Africa. Also, peace activists should communicate peace with the relevant societies' approval. With this issue, online media platforms are more efficient when peace communication includes users' perception of media tools. At a broader glance, the relationship between the governments and their citizens should change so that human rights are prioritized to protect them from achieving sustainable peace.

Finally, there are lessons to be drawn for peacekeepers. Women peacekeepers are primarily essential in certain parts of Africa in conflict resolution, whereas there is a limitation in their involvement. In the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) example, peacekeepers' training is mostly done on a masculine basis, excluding women. In addition to their training, women peacekeepers should be deployed by taking local contexts into consideration. Women's

involvement in peacekeeping is significant not only for Africa but also for similar environments affected by armed conflict elsewhere in the world.

Overall, the contributions in this volume presented a mixed picture of the conflict response in Africa with successes, failures, challenges, and opportunities. On the other hand, the discussions are emphatic that there is already a wealth of experience in Africa that is very much a part of African life, communities, and political leadership. Until recent times, when conflict response was considered in Africa, there has often been a tendency to look for knowledge and experience imported from outside. However, as this volume has extensively presented, on the contrary, Africa has much to teach the rest of the world about conflict response. It is essential that conflict response elsewhere should make all attempts possible to learn from those experiences in Africa, whether these are about truth and reconciliation commissions, local peacebuilding models, or inspirational political leadership such as that of Nelson Mandela. Hence, we have dedicated this book to African leaders at all levels who contribute to peace and development in the continent.