



Let's re-imagine Africa's architecture of lasting peace

Within the contemporary African security landscape, most notably across the Horn and the Sahel—mediation has evolved from a diplomatic preference into a fundamental tool for State survival.

However, current frameworks frequently yield procedural successes that mask substantive fragility. These “false dawns” emerge because traditional diplomacy prioritises the “elite bargain,” a model that masterfully executes the ceremony of the handshake while neglecting the underlying architecture of settlement.

The Somalia trajectory, despite decades of intervention, epitomizes this failure; peace remains precarious because negotiations primarily orbit Mogadishu-based elites, remaining detached from the lived realities of the periphery.

The systemic failure of the elite bargain model is driven by: Track disconnect: A profound chasm between high-level bargains and the processes essential to religious leaders, elders, and civil society.

Simmering grievances: Top-heavy military stabilisation that fails to address localised clan disputes and the economic marginalisation of peripheral communities.

Youth exclusion: A strategic oversight that ignores the demographic majority, effectively ceding this vital constituency to the very insurgencies mediation seeks to neutralise.

Moving beyond “reactive firefighting” necessitates a paradigm shift from political optics toward settlements anchored in cultural legitimacy.

Cultural legitimacy: Sustainable mediation requires “cultural embeddedness,” an attribute often missing in Western-centric diplomatic frameworks. Imported models rely on court-centric frameworks of understanding that prioritise neutrality as distance and legalism as the sole source of authority. Con-

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Peace Kibeedi
Peace negotiations



versely, African relational world-views emphasise collective dignity and restorative justice.

While cultural resonance provides the necessary social anchor, it remains insufficient if divorced from a cold-eyed appraisal of power asymmetries and the distorting influence of external geopolitical interests.

‘Principled realism’ demands the recognition of inherent power imbalances between sovereign states, armed factions, and civilians without romanticising the reconciliation process. To safeguard asymmetrical negotiations, African mediators must employ these rigorous mechanics:

Strategic sequencing ordering negotiations to prevent the further marginalization of vulnerable stakeholders during the transition.

Credible monitoring establishing ceasefire mechanisms that command cross-factional trust rather than merely serving the interests of signatories.

Accountability provisions embedding justice within frameworks to ensure that peace is not a temporary “trade” for calm, which historically invites future instability.

Furthermore, the African Union and IGAD must confront ‘conceptual dependence’. Financial reliance on external donors often compels the adoption of donor-driven templates that ignore local nuances. In the Horn

and Sahel, global rivalries involving Gulf states and Western powers frequently transform mediation spaces into proxy battlegrounds. True ‘strategic autonomy’ is essential to ensure that African-led frameworks prioritize local social cohesion over external geopolitical competition.

Inclusion is not a tokenistic gesture but a vital preventative mechanism. Robust data confirms that women’s participation correlates with durable outcomes, while youth engagement is a demographic imperative. To move away from event-based success, we must adopt a five-year trajectory model that measures systemic stability through three dices:

Displacement levels: Measurable, sustained reductions in internal and external displacement.

Economic reintegration: The transition of former combatants into the productive, formal economy.

Legitimacy perception: The degree to which local communities—not just international observers—perceive the settlement as just. The hybridisation model facilitates this by linking formal Track I ceasefire talks and constitutional assemblies to grassroots community dialogues.

Africa possesses the heritage and capacity to design its own peace architecture, yet it requires the confidence to prioritise the restoration of the social fabric over political expediency. Failure to innovate will condemn the continent to a repetitive cycle of agreement without resolution. Transformative settlements must rest on three non-negotiable pillars:

Cultural Legitimacy that resonates with the collective dignity of relational societies, structural Inclusion that moves beyond elite bargains to empower women and youth and strategic autonomy that allows African bodies to prioritise local stability over the dictates of external powers.

Peace Kibeedi is a candidate of MSc in Mediation and Negotiation at African University.