

DRC's mediation: When many cooks spoil the broth

The ink had barely dried on the Washington Accords when M23 rebels launched fresh attacks in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

On February 1, weeks after Presidents Felix Tshisekedi and Paul Kagame shook hands in the Oval Office, at the White House in the USA, drone strikes hit Kisangani airport.

By mid-February, fighting persisted despite ceasefires signed in Washington, Doha and Luanda.

The pattern is depressingly familiar: grand peace pronouncements followed by renewed bloodshed and mass displacement.

This crisis exposes a fundamental flaw in Africa's approach to conflict resolution. Multiple overlapping mediation processes compete for legitimacy: the East African Community's Nairobi Process, Angola's Luanda Process, Togo representing the African Union, and the US working with Qatar.

Rather than complementing one another, these initiatives create what scholars call "conflict resolution musical chairs" — a dangerous game in which warring par-

EAC member, we contributed to the EAC Regional Force deployed to eastern DRC in 2022, only to see Kinshasa accuse the Kenya-led mission of bias and eject it.

Uganda hosts hundreds of thousands of Congolese refugees and maintains significant commercial ties across the border. Yet the Nairobi Process, led by former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, has been sidelined and overshadowed by external mediators.

Meanwhile, the African Union oscillates between asserting primacy and deferring responsibility. Togo's President Faure Gnassingbé holds the AU mediation mandate, but the AU's influence pales beside that of the United States and Qatar, whose diplomatic and financial leverage carries greater weight with the parties.

External engagement has value — Washington's willingness to impose sanctions for violations shows that consequences matter.

But when African institutions relinquish leadership, they reinforce the perception that "African solutions to African problems" is mere rhetoric.

The human cost of this dysfunction is staggering: more than seven million displaced, war crimes documented by the UN, and thousands forcibly recruited, including children. Each failed ceasefire erodes trust not only in specific agreements but in mediation itself.

What would coherent mediation look like? African institutions must enforce coordination rather than competition.

The AU Peace and Security Council should establish a single mediation framework with clear roles: regional bodies handling tactical negotiations, and the AU providing strategic oversight and accountability.

Mediators must also address root causes — mineral competition, historical grievances between Rwanda and DRC, and cross-border armed groups. Ceasefires are necessary but insufficient if underlying drivers remain unresolved.

Finally, African mediators should leverage, not compete with, external actors.

African leadership on substance and legitimacy, external partners on enforcement and incentives — would strengthen outcomes.

...effective mediators must demonstrate impartiality and possess the political will.



ties seek favourable terms while peace remains elusive.

The proliferation reflects confusion over subsidiarity in Africa's peace architecture. The 2008 AU-REC Memorandum states that conflicts should be handled at the most appropriate level.

In theory, regional actors understand local dynamics and have direct stakes in stability. In practice, subsidiarity has too often become a cover for institutional rivalry and buck-passing.

Uganda's position illustrates the dilemma. As an

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