



National Peace Institutions and Public Policy: Institutional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

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Abstract

Peace remains the cornerstone of human progress, social stability, and sustainable development. Yet, Africa, particularly West Africa, has been plagued by recurrent conflicts, coups, and fragile democratization processes. Despite the existence of regional and sub-regional security mechanisms such as the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) conflict prevention protocols, the continent continues to grapple with instability. This manuscript advances the argument that the establishment of National Peace Institutions (NPIs) across African states, linked to regional and sub-regional organisations, can provide a transformative framework for peacebuilding. Drawing upon liberal structuralist theory, Johan Galtung's concept of positive peace, and public policy analysis, the study critiques the limitations of realist security paradigms and proposes institutional innovations rooted in African cultural, social, and political contexts. Using empirical insights, comparative case studies, and policy frameworks such as Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), Security Sector Reform (SSR), and the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, the manuscript explores how NPIs can serve as vehicles for conflict prevention, peace education, early warning systems, and sustainable governance. The findings underscore the need for a paradigm shift from militarised "negative peace" to inclusive, justice-oriented "positive peace" through institutionalised public policy mechanisms.

Keywords: National Peace, Public Policy, Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Institutional Mechanisms

Introduction

Peace and security are universally recognised as prerequisites for development, prosperity, and human dignity. Without peace, societies cannot sustain economic growth, protect human rights, or foster democratic governance. The United Nations' International Day of Peace, established in 1982, symbolises global commitment to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Yet, for Africa, this day resonates with particular urgency. The continent has witnessed protracted conflicts, civil wars, and coups, many of which have lasted decades with limited resolution. West Africa, in particular, has emerged as one of the most unstable sub-regions globally. Liberia and Sierra Leone endured devastating civil wars; Guinea-Bissau experienced internecine conflict in the late 1990s; Senegal continues to grapple with separatist insurgency in Casamance; Mali and Niger face recurring Tuareg rebellions; and Côte d'Ivoire, once a beacon of stability, descended into civil war in 2002. ECOWAS states remain among the poorest in the world, and the region is disproportionately coup-prone, accounting for more than half of Africa's successful military coups since independence (Igbuzor, 2011). Despite the existence of AU and ECOWAS security mechanisms, peace remains elusive. Current institutions are largely reactive, addressing the consequences of conflict rather than its root causes. They are grounded in realist assumptions that conflict is inevitable, human nature is selfish, and peace must be imposed through force (Morgenthau, 1973). This approach produces only "negative peace", the absence of war without addressing structural injustices, inequality, or governance deficits (Chambas, 2004).

This manuscript argues for a paradigm shift: the establishment of National Peace Institutions (NPIs) in every African state. These institutions would formulate and implement peace policies, promote peace education, adopt early warning systems, and link with sub-regional and regional organisations to build sustainable peace. Rooted in liberal structuralist theory, NPIs would address structural causes of conflict: poverty, exclusion, injustice, and inequality while fostering Galtung's notion of *positive peace*: justice, equality, and inner peace at both societal and individual levels (Galtung, 1990). The central research questions guiding this study are:

1. Can NPIs maintain peace in Africa?
2. Can peace policies formulated by NPIs be effectively implemented?
3. Will peace education foster sustainable peace?
4. Can early warning and response mechanisms prevent conflict escalation?
5. Will linkages between NPIs, sub-regional, and regional organisations strengthen peace governance?

Theoretical Background

Realist Paradigm: The realist school, epitomised by Hans Morgenthau (1973), posits that conflict is inevitable due to the selfish, power-driven nature of states and individuals. National interest is defined in terms of power, and clashes of interest inevitably lead to conflict. Realist-inspired institutions in African militaries, paramilitaries, and security agencies are designed to impose peace through force. However, this produces only “negative peace,” which lacks justice, accountability, and equitable resource distribution (Job, 1992).

Liberal Structuralism: Liberal structuralism, advanced by scholars such as Johan Galtung (1990), Ross (1993), and Scarborough (1998), argues that conflict is embedded in structural inequalities and social organisation. Poverty, exclusion, exploitation, and injustice are the root causes of violence. Peace requires structural reforms, inclusive governance, and equitable distribution of resources. NPIs, grounded in this theory, would focus on eliminating structural defects through policy innovation.

Positive vs. Negative Peace: Galtung (1990) distinguishes between *negative peace* (absence of direct violence) and *positive peace* (absence of structural violence, presence of justice, equality, and harmony). Current African institutions largely deliver negative peace, often through military intervention. NPIs would aim for positive peace by addressing root causes and fostering justice-oriented policies.

Human Security Framework: The human security paradigm, advanced by UNDP (1994), expands the concept of security beyond military threats to include economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. NPIs would integrate human security principles, ensuring that peace policies address multidimensional vulnerabilities.

Peacebuilding Frameworks

Relevant frameworks include:

1. DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration): Essential for post-conflict recovery.
2. SSR (Security Sector Reform): Ensures accountable, rights-based security institutions.
3. UN Peacebuilding Architecture: Provides global guidance on institution-building, governance, and reconciliation.

Public Policy and Peacebuilding: Public policy is the mechanism through which governments attempt to address societal challenges by instituting laws, regulations, decisions, and actions (Otishi, 2012). In the context of peacebuilding, public policy becomes the instrument for institutionalising peace as a national priority. Unlike ad hoc interventions or externally driven peace processes, public policy embeds peace into the governance architecture of the state.

Public Policy as a Tool for Peace

- **Policy Formulation:** Governments must design policies that address structural causes of conflict, including poverty, exclusion, and injustice.
- **Policy Implementation:** Effective institutions are required to translate policy into practice. This includes

ministries, commissions, and agencies dedicated to peace.

- **Policy Evaluation:** Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms ensure that peace policies remain relevant and effective.

Peacebuilding through Policy

Peacebuilding requires more than military interventions; it demands comprehensive policies that integrate social, economic, and political dimensions. Public policy can:

- Promote peace education to instil values of tolerance and non-violence.
- Establish early warning systems to detect and respond to potential conflicts.
- Foster inclusive governance that addresses grievances of marginalised groups.
- Ensure equitable resource distribution to reduce economic inequalities.

National Peace Institutions: Concepts and Models Conceptualising NPIs

National Peace Institutions (NPIs) are formal state structures—ministries, commissions, or agencies dedicated to peace promotion. Unlike traditional security institutions, NPIs would be rooted in liberal structuralist philosophy, focusing on structural reforms rather than coercive force.

Functions of NPIs

- **Policy Formulation:** Develop comprehensive peace policies addressing social relations, governance, and justice.
- **Peace Education:** Promote a culture of peace through curricula, public campaigns, and community engagement.
- **Early Warning Systems:** Monitor potential conflict triggers and coordinate rapid responses.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Mediate disputes at local and national levels.
- **Linkages:** Connect with sub-regional (ECOWAS) and regional (AU) organisations for coordinated peace efforts.

Models of NPIs

- **Ministry of Peace:** A cabinet-level institution responsible for national peace policy.
- **Peace Commission:** An independent body tasked with conflict prevention and resolution.
- **Peace Agency:** A specialised agency focusing on peace education, research, and community engagement.

Each model must be tailored to the cultural, social, and political context of the state, ensuring relevance and legitimacy.

Peacekeeping and Conflict Management Frameworks: Peacekeeping in Africa

Peacekeeping has been a central strategy for managing conflicts in Africa. AU and ECOWAS have deployed peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali. However, these missions often face challenges of funding, logistics, and legitimacy. Conflict Management Frameworks

- **Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR):** Essential for stabilizing post-conflict societies by reintegrating ex-combatants.
- **Security Sector Reform (SSR):** Ensures that security institutions are accountable, rights-based, and inclusive.
- **Early Warning Systems:** AU's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) and ECOWAS's Mechanism for Conflict Prevention are designed to detect threats. However, their effectiveness is limited by weak linkages to national institutions.
- **UN Peacebuilding Architecture:** Provides global guidance on institution-building, governance, and reconciliation.

Integrating NPIs into Peacekeeping: NPIs can complement peacekeeping by:

- Providing local legitimacy and cultural relevance.
- Ensuring sustainability through policy integration.
- Linking national efforts with regional and international frameworks

Role of State and Non-State Actors, Case Studies, and Institutional Challenges: Role of State and Non-State Actors in Peace Governance

State Actors

States remain the primary custodians of peace and security. Their role in peace governance includes:

- **Legislation and Policy:** National parliaments and executive branches formulate laws and policies that shape peacebuilding. For example, Nigeria's National Policy on
- **Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution** provides a framework for managing internal conflicts.
- **Security Institutions:** Militaries, police, and paramilitary agencies are tasked with maintaining order. However, their realist orientation often emphasises coercion rather than prevention.
- **Judiciary:** Courts play a critical role in adjudicating disputes and ensuring justice, which is essential for positive peace.
- **National Peace Institutions (NPIs):** Proposed ministries or commissions of peace would institutionalise peace governance, ensuring that peace is not treated as an ad hoc concern but as a permanent national priority.

Non-State Actors

Non-state actors are equally vital in peace governance, often filling gaps left by weak state institutions.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs): These groups advocate for human rights, mediate conflicts, and promote peace education. For instance, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) has been instrumental in grassroots peace initiatives.

- **Faith-Based Organisations:** Religious institutions wield significant influence in African societies. Their moral authority can be harnessed for reconciliation and peace education.
- **Media:** The media shapes public opinion and can either inflame tensions or promote dialogue. Responsible journalism is critical for peace governance.
- **International Organizations:** The UN, AU, and ECOWAS provide frameworks, funding, and technical support for peace initiatives.
- **Private Sector:** Businesses have a stake in stability and can contribute to peace through corporate social responsibility and inclusive economic policies.

Synergy Between State and Non-State Actors

Effective peace governance requires collaboration between state and non-state actors. NPIs would serve as platforms for such collaboration, ensuring that peace policies are inclusive, participatory, and culturally relevant.

Case Studies and Comparative Analysis

Liberia and Sierra Leone

Both countries experienced devastating civil wars in the 1990s and early 2000s. International interventions, including UN peacekeeping missions and ECOWAS involvement, helped end the conflicts. However, the absence of strong national peace institutions meant that peace remained fragile. DDR programs were implemented, but reintegration challenges persisted. NPIs could have institutionalised peace policies, ensuring sustainability beyond external interventions.

Guinea-Bissau

The brief civil conflict of 1998–1999 highlighted the fragility of state institutions. Despite ECOWAS mediation, the country continues to face instability due to weak governance and military interference. A national peace institution could provide a framework for addressing structural causes of conflict, including poverty and political exclusion.

Senegal (Casamance Conflict)

The Casamance separatist conflict has persisted for decades. Despite peace agreements, the conflict remains unresolved. The absence of a dedicated national peace institution means that efforts are fragmented. An NPI could coordinate peace policies, engage local communities, and ensure that agreements are implemented.

Mali and Niger (Tuareg Rebellions)

Recurring Tuareg rebellions highlight the challenges of managing ethnic and regional grievances. International interventions, including French military operations and UN missions, have provided temporary stability. However, structural issues marginalisation, poverty, and governance deficits remain unaddressed. NPIs could institutionalise policies that address these root causes, fostering positive peace.

Côte d'Ivoire

Once a stable country, Côte d'Ivoire descended into civil war in 2002. ECOWAS and UN interventions helped restore stability, but the absence of national peace institutions meant that reconciliation and structural reforms were limited. NPIs could have provided a framework for addressing grievances and promoting inclusive governance.

Comparative Analysis

Across these cases, a common theme emerges: external interventions provide temporary stability, but the absence of national peace institutions undermines sustainability. NPIs could bridge this gap by institutionalising peace policies, promoting education, and linking national efforts with regional and international frameworks.

Weak Institutional Capacity

African states often lack the institutional capacity to implement peace policies effectively. Bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, and resource constraints undermine peace initiatives. NPIs must be designed to overcome these challenges through capacity building, transparency, and accountability. Peace initiatives are often fragmented, with multiple actors working in isolation. This leads to duplication of efforts and inefficiency. NPIs could serve as coordinating bodies, ensuring synergy among state and non-state actors. Peacebuilding requires significant resources, including funding, expertise, and infrastructure. Many African states face resource constraints that limit their ability to sustain peace initiatives. NPIs must be supported by regional and international organisations to ensure sustainability. Peace institutions must be perceived as legitimate and trustworthy. In many African states, citizens distrust government institutions due to corruption and exclusion. NPIs must be participatory, inclusive, and culturally relevant to build legitimacy. The success of NPIs depends on political will. Without commitment from political leaders, peace institutions risk becoming symbolic rather than functional. Advocacy and civil society engagement are essential to generate political support. The role of state and non-state actors, the lessons from case studies, and the institutional challenges all point to the need for NPIs. These institutions would provide a framework for addressing structural causes of conflict, coordinating peace efforts, and ensuring sustainability. By linking national, sub-regional, and regional efforts, NPIs could transform Africa's peace landscape from reactive conflict management to proactive peacebuilding.

Policy Design, Implementation, Monitoring, and Recommendations Policy Design and Implementation Strategies

Designing Peace Policies

Policy design in the context of peacebuilding must be comprehensive, inclusive, and context-specific. Unlike traditional security policies that emphasise coercion, peace policies should focus on structural reforms and social justice. Key elements include:

- **Inclusivity:** Policies must reflect the voices of marginalised groups, including women, youth, ethnic minorities, and displaced populations.
- **Cultural Relevance:** Peace policies must resonate with local customs, traditions, and religious practices to ensure legitimacy.
- **Evidence-Based:** Policies should be grounded in empirical research, drawing upon lessons from past conflicts and peacebuilding initiatives.
- **Flexibility:** Policies must be adaptable to changing contexts, allowing for rapid responses to emerging threats.

Implementation Strategies

Effective implementation requires robust institutions, political will, and resource mobilisation. Strategies include:

- **Institutionalisation:** Establish NPIs as permanent state structures with clear mandates, adequate funding, and professional staff.
- **Capacity Building:** Train personnel in conflict analysis, mediation, peace education, and policy implementation.
- **Coordination:** Ensure synergy between NPIs, security institutions, civil society, and international organisations.
- **Decentralisation:** Establish local peace councils or committees to implement policies at community levels.
- **Integration:** Link peace policies with broader development agendas, including poverty reduction, education, and health.

Challenges in Implementation

- **Political Resistance:** Leaders may resist peace policies that challenge entrenched interests.
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited funding and expertise can undermine implementation.
- **Institutional Weakness:** Weak bureaucracies may lack the capacity to implement complex policies.
- **Conflict Dynamics:** Ongoing conflicts may disrupt implementation efforts.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Sustainability of Peace Policies: Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

M&E is critical for assessing the effectiveness of peace policies and ensuring accountability. Key components include:

- **Indicators:** Develop measurable indicators of peace, such as reduction in violence, increased trust in institutions, and improved social cohesion.
- **Data Collection:** Use surveys, interviews, and participatory methods to gather data from communities.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish channels for citizens to provide feedback on peace policies.
- **Reporting:** NPIs should publish regular reports on policy outcomes, ensuring transparency.

Sustainability

Sustainability requires embedding peace policies into the governance architecture of the state. Strategies include:

- **Institutionalisation:** Ensure NPIs are permanent structures with legal mandates.
- **Resource Mobilisation:** Secure funding from national budgets, donor agencies, and private sector contributions.
- **Capacity Development:** Invest in training and education to build a critical mass of peace experts.
- **Community Ownership:** Engage local communities in policy design and implementation to foster ownership.
- **Regional Linkages:** Connect NPIs with sub-regional and regional organisations to ensure coordinated efforts.

Risks to Sustainability

- **Political Instability:** Coups and regime changes can undermine peace institutions.
- **Donor Dependence:** Overreliance on external funding can jeopardise sustainability.
- **Weak Governance:** Corruption and inefficiency can erode institutional effectiveness.

Policy design, implementation, monitoring, and sustainability are critical for the success of NPIs. By institutionalising peace policies, promoting education, strengthening early warning systems, fostering inclusive governance, and enhancing regional linkages, Africa can move from reactive conflict management to proactive peacebuilding. The recommendations provide a roadmap for transforming peace governance in Africa, ensuring that peace is not only achieved but sustained.

Analysis

The paper analyses the shortcomings of Africa's current peace and security architecture by demonstrating that existing mechanisms are predominantly reactive, focusing on conflict management rather than conflict prevention. It argues that although regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS have contributed to restoring stability in conflict-affected states, their interventions have produced only temporary peace because they do not

adequately address the structural drivers of violence, including poverty, political exclusion, poor governance, inequality, and social injustice.

Drawing on liberal structuralist theory, Galtung's concept of positive peace, and the human security framework, the paper contends that sustainable peace requires institutional reforms that integrate peacebuilding into national governance. The proposed National Peace Institutions (NPIs) are presented as a practical policy mechanism for promoting peace education, formulating peace-oriented public policies, strengthening early warning and response systems, and coordinating peace efforts among governments, civil society, and regional organisations. The comparative case studies further demonstrate that countries lacking permanent national peace institutions remain vulnerable to recurring instability despite extensive international peacekeeping efforts.

The study establishes that durable peace in Africa cannot rely solely on military interventions or external mediation. Instead, it requires institutionalised, policy-driven approaches that promote justice, inclusiveness, accountability, and national ownership of peacebuilding processes. This shift from reactive security responses to proactive peace governance forms the central contribution of the paper.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that the persistent recurrence of conflicts and political instability in Africa, particularly within West Africa, reflects the limitations of existing security arrangements that are largely reactive and militarised. Although institutions such as the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have contributed to conflict management, the findings suggest that their interventions have been more effective in containing violence than in preventing its recurrence. This supports Galtung's concept of negative peace, where the absence of open conflict does not necessarily translate into justice, equity, or long-term social stability.

The paper further argues that the institutionalisation of National Peace Institutions (NPIs) offers a more sustainable approach to peacebuilding by addressing the structural drivers of conflict, including poverty, political exclusion, weak governance, and inequality. This position aligns with liberal structuralist theory, which maintains that durable peace can only be achieved through reforms that eliminate structural violence and promote inclusive governance. The proposed functions of NPIs- peace policy formulation, peace education, early warning systems, conflict mediation, and collaboration with regional organisations- demonstrate their potential to shift African states from crisis response to preventive peace governance.

The comparative case studies of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Mali, Niger, and Côte d'Ivoire reinforce this argument. While international peacekeeping missions and regional interventions succeeded in reducing hostilities, their long-term impact was constrained by the absence of permanent national institutions dedicated to sustaining peace. This suggests that external interventions alone cannot guarantee lasting peace without complementary domestic structures capable of institutionalising reconciliation, promoting social cohesion, and ensuring policy continuity.

The analysis also highlights that the effectiveness of NPIs will depend on several enabling factors. Strong political commitment, adequate funding, professional capacity, transparent governance, and meaningful collaboration between governments, civil society organisations, traditional institutions, faith-based organisations, and regional bodies are essential for successful implementation. Without these conditions, NPIs risk becoming symbolic institutions with limited operational effectiveness.

The study contributes to the growing discourse on preventive peacebuilding by proposing a governance model that integrates peace into national public policy rather than treating it solely as a security issue. The findings therefore suggest that institutionalising peace through dedicated national mechanisms could strengthen conflict prevention, improve governance, and promote sustainable development across African states. However, the success of this approach ultimately depends on sustained political will, effective policy implementation, and continuous monitoring to ensure that peace initiatives remain responsive to emerging social and political challenges.

Suggestions

Based on the analysis, the following suggestions are proposed:

- Create ministries, commissions, or agencies dedicated to peace in every African state.
- Ensure these institutions have clear mandates, adequate funding, and professional staff.
- Integrate peace education into school curricula at all levels.
- Conduct public campaigns to promote tolerance, dialogue, and non-violence.
- Develop national early warning systems linked to AU's Continental Early Warning System and ECOWAS's Mechanism for Conflict Prevention.
- Train personnel in conflict analysis and rapid response.
- Ensure that peace policies address grievances of marginalised groups.
- Promote participatory decision-making processes.
- Strengthen collaboration between NPIs, ECOWAS, and AU.
- Share best practices, research, and resources across states.
- Allocate national budgetary resources to NPIs.
- Engage donor agencies, NGOs, and the private sector in funding peace initiatives.
- Invest in training programs for peace professionals.
- Establish partnerships with universities and research institutions to develop peace curricula.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess policy outcomes.
- Publish regular reports to ensure transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

Peace is not merely the absence of war; it is the presence of justice, equality, and sustainable governance. Africa's persistent instability, particularly in West Africa, underscores the inadequacy of existing security institutions rooted in realist paradigms. These institutions, while effective in imposing temporary order, fail to address the structural causes of conflict: poverty, exclusion, injustice, and inequality. This manuscript has argued for a paradigm shift: the establishment of National Peace Institutions (NPIs) across African states. Grounded in liberal structuralist theory and Galtung's concept of *positive peace*, NPIs would institutionalise peace policies, promote peace education, adopt early warning systems, and foster linkages with sub-regional and regional organisations. By embedding peace into public policy, NPIs would transform peace governance from reactive conflict management to proactive peacebuilding. Case studies from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Mali, Niger, and Côte d'Ivoire illustrate the limitations of external interventions and the need for national ownership of peace processes. Institutional challenges weak capacity, resource constraints, fragmentation, and lack of legitimacy highlight the importance of designing NPIs that are inclusive, participatory, and culturally relevant. Policy recommendations emphasise the need to establish NPIs, promote peace education, strengthen early warning systems, foster inclusive governance, enhance regional linkages, mobilise resources, build capacity, and ensure accountability. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential for assessing policy outcomes and ensuring sustainability. Ultimately, peace in Africa requires a shift from militarised "negative peace" to justice-oriented "positive peace." NPIs provide a framework for achieving this transformation, ensuring that peace is not only achieved but sustained. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to peace scholarship, inform policy design, and guide the efforts of states, NGOs, and regional organisations in building a peaceful Africa.

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