



Foreword

Cedric de Coning

This edition of the journal marks 25 years of the existence of the African Journal on Conflict Resolution (AJCR). The first issue of the AJCR was published in April 1999. The Founder and Executive Director of ACCORD, Dr Vasu Gounden, had a vision of African conflict resolution rooted in research. He identified the need for a journal that could become a repository of African knowledge grounded in Africa's own experiences in managing and resolving conflict. The founding managing editor of the journal was Prof. Jannie Malan. He developed the AJCR over its first 22 years until he retired in 2021. Since then, Managing Editor Dr Andrea Prah and I have had the privilege of continuing to develop the journal.

Over the past 25 years the AJCR has published approximately 264 articles and 60 book reviews that have covered a wide range of African conflict resolution topics and with some recurring themes such as natural resource conflicts, chieftaincy disputes, traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, inter- and intra-state peace mediation, peacekeeping operations, transitional justice and reconciliation, and the role of women and youth in conflict resolution. The journal has been open source since its founding and has attained the status of a diamond open access journal. This rich data-set of African knowledge on conflict resolution practices is therefore freely available on the ACCORD website. Print editions have also been distributed to subscribers over the years and to most of the universities in Africa that offer conflict resolution or peace study courses in their curricula. The AJCR is accredited through the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and, since 2022, it has been available on the Academy of Science of South Africa's (ASSAf) Khulisa Journal platform.

In this issue of the journal, we cover a range of African conflict resolution experiences, including the role of civil society in the peace process in South Sudan, the transitional government arrangement in Sudan, traditional healers in Zimbabwe, traditional dispute resolution in Ethiopia and transitional justice in Burundi.

Ibrahim Sakawa Magara and Miranda Rivers consider the role of civil society in South Sudan's peace process. They found that a small number of individuals have captured the civil society sector and that it is divided along political and ethnic lines. This makes the sector no less troubling than its political counterpart. The article finds that civil society is not always a force for peace and the sector's inclusion does not necessarily contribute to legitimising or sustaining peace processes and their outcomes.

Isidore Nsengiyumva assesses how the Burundi Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) shaped ongoing healing, reconciliation and transitional justice efforts in post-conflict Burundi. With a focus on the 1972-1973 massacres, the article concludes that the TRC's findings sparked debate in the Senate and the wider public. This further led to the re-examination of the legacy of colonisation and its impact on cementing the ethnic divisions that led to cyclic mass violence in Burundi.

Derara Ansha Roba studied traditional dispute resolution practices in Ethiopia and, specifically, its relationship with the formal justice system. The article finds that, despite occasional tensions and lack of clarity on the boundaries between the formal justice system and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, overall the collaboration enhanced conflict management within the community where the research was conducted.

Takesure Taringana and Amos Zevure analyse the historical role of traditional healers in conflict resolution in Zimbabwe. Under colonial rule in Zimbabwe, colonial legal and justice systems replaced traditional conflict resolution institutions. Nonetheless, traditional healers continued to exist underground. They were consulted to resolve disputes between individuals, families and even communities and they also contributed to preventing future conflicts by promoting understanding, empathy and cooperation among community members. Despite the colonial and missionary influences, traditional healing practices persisted and continued to hold sway in many communities. The article concludes that this is an indication of their relevance to resolving conflicts within the local context.

Mariana Llorens Zabala and Andrew E. Yaw Tchie assess the use of transitional agreements to resolve differences between the state and non-state armed actors across the African continent. Drawing on the civilian-led Transitional Government of Sudan between 2019 and 2021, the article argues that this transitional government failed because it was unable to dismantle existing power structures – it essentially remained a form of military government. ◆