

Chapter 19

Navigating Channels for Civil Society Participation in Conflict Prevention and Peace-Making in the African Peace and Security Architecture



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Abstract The African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) that are building blocks of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) gradually elaborated structures for conflict prevention and peace-making and mediated negotiations in numerous conflicts in the last two decades. African civil society organisations (CSOs) with relevant expertise helped to build APSA structures, whilst CSOs in conflict-affected countries interacted with structures and mediators as stakeholders of interventions. However, the channels CSOs could use to participate in structures of APSA building blocks and their inclusion in mediations varied sharply. The chapter reviews channels for CSOs to participate in APSA structures and in mediations. It argues that the APSA saw a proliferation of policies for inclusive conflict prevention and peace-making, which political decision-makers and mediators would need to fully embrace. CSOs were routinely consulted in mediations, but the impact of their inputs on mediation agendas and agreements hinged on the volition of mediators and dominant conflict actors. CSOs had to constantly navigate channels for participation to identify pathways and dead ends.

Keywords APSA · AU · ECOWAS · SADC · Civil society inclusion · Mediation · Preventive diplomacy · Early warning

19.1 Introduction

The African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), which constitute the regional building blocks of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), play a critical role in conflict prevention and peace-making in Sub-Saharan Africa, but their organisational structures and peace processes, which they mediate, provide few channels for the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs). This chapter critically reviews channels CSOs may use to interact with

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organisational structures for prevention and peace-making and be included in mediation processes that are mandated by the AU, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The AU and RECs have gradually elaborated their institutions for conflict prevention and peace-making since the construction of the APSA was initiated with the adoption of the Protocol on the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council by the AU Assembly in 2002 (AU 2002; Karbo/Murithi 2018, pp. 1–5). The APSA pillars for decision-making, early warning, peace diplomacy, peacekeeping and the financing of peace operations of the AU and the equivalent institutional structures of RECs have, in recent years, been complemented with mediation support structures. African Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), which specialise in peace and security, contribute to the development of APSA structures and local CSOs in conflict-affected countries interact with these structures as stakeholders of their conflict prevention and peace-making efforts. The AU and RECs maintain civil society interfaces to liaise with CSOs, but availability and viability of channels for civil society to participate in structures for conflict prevention and peace-making vary sharply (Aeby 2021, pp. 1–7).

Whilst mediation was already a conflict management strategy of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), the AU and RECs facilitated many of the 294 peace agreements that were concluded in Sub-Saharan Africa between 2002, when the AU was founded, and 2015 (Coe/Nash 2020, p. 163). In 2018 alone, the APSA building blocks responded to 14 conflicts and facilitated 13 peace agreements. Most of these agreements, however, collapsed within a year (IPSS 2020, 52). The peace-making efforts of the AU and RECs have, moreover, traditionally relied on high-level mediations by sitting presidents, who often facilitate narrow power-sharing pacts between political and military elites (Nathan et al. 2015, p. 88; Sriram/Zahar 2009; Vandeginste 2013). Mediation guidelines, which the AU and RECs adopted in recent years, recommend the inclusion of civil society in peace negotiations and the implementation of agreements, and their mediators consult local civil society stakeholders. However, although CSOs play an important role in representing communities and in peacebuilding on the local level, civil society actors rarely get a seat at the negotiation table, where they would have a say on the content of agreements. Since the broad-based ownership of peace processes is, according to the inclusive peace paradigm, a condition to translate negotiated accords into stable political settlements and sustainable peace, a lack of civil society inclusion may undermine the mediation efforts of the AU and RECs (Aeby 2021, pp. 1–7).

This chapter serves to critically review and compare the policy and practice on civil society participation in conflict prevention and peace-making in three organisations that are part of the APSA: the AU, ECOWAS SADC. The objective of the discussion is to, firstly, assess the viability of channels the organisations offer to CSOs to engage relevant organisational structures, including decision-making organs, early warning systems, panels for peace diplomacy, and mediation support units. Secondly, the chapter serves to examine consultative mechanisms and other features of peace process designs that are commonly applied to include the voices of local society actors in negotiations that are mediated by the three organisations. The review of

both organisational structures and mediation processes seeks to assess the benefits and limitations of channels civil society actors may choose to claim space for participation and represent their interests in prevention and peace-making efforts in the APSA.

The chapter argues that the AU and RECs saw a proliferation of policies and guidelines for inclusive conflict prevention and peace-making, which were drafted by consultants from NGOs and technical experts in the organisations, who diffused the inclusive peace paradigm. The extent to which political decision-makers and high-level mediators embraced and translated these norms into practice varied considerably. The organisations provided a range of access points for CSOs to engage APSA structures, but several civil society interfaces and relevant structures were either defunct or need reform. Whilst local civil society stakeholders were routinely consulted in mediations, the impact their inputs made on mediation agendas and agreements hinged on the volition of lead mediators and dominant conflict parties. Inclusive peace process designs were proposed in mediation guidelines but seldomly applied in practice. The channels for civil society participation in the APSA, thus, included viable pathways and dead ends, which civil society actors had to constantly navigate anew (Aeby 2021, pp. 54–59).

The discussion focuses on: (a) African NGOs that specialise in peace and security; (b) local civil society groups, which include national and subnational-level CSOs in conflict affected-countries that are stakeholders of interventions; and (c) regional NGO networks that act as intermediaries between local CSOs and the inter-governmental organisations (IGOs). It examines and compares the AU, ECOWAS and SADC as the organisations are key components of the APSA, include important subregion, and enable an insightful comparison owing to different policies and practices on civil society participation. The findings that are presented in this chapter were produced through a comparative content analysis of policy frameworks, analysis of organisational structures, and process tracing of selected mediations. The empirical sources include policy documents, communiqués, and 48 semi-structured interviews with officials of the organisations, civil society actors and experts, which were conducted between May 2019 and February 2020, which constitutes the cut-off point of the analysis. The interviewees were selected owing to their in-depth knowledge of APSA structures and peace processes, and their perspectives heavily inform the findings of the explorative study, which are preliminary owing to the limited representativity of the data. Since the SADC Secretariat did not assist our research, the discussion of the SADC case relies on external sources. The chapter summarises findings that were previously published in a report *on Civil Society Participation in Peace-Making and Mediation Support*, which the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation produced in collaboration with the German Corporation for Development Cooperation (GIZ).¹ The research was, moreover, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. The following sections include a brief overview of the role of civil society in conflict prevention and peace-making, the three case studies on

¹ For a detailed list of interviews and primary sources, see the original report: (Aeby 2021).

the AU, ECOWAS and SADC, a comparison of their policies and practices, and a conclusion.

19.2 Civil Society in Peacebuilding, Peace-making and Intergovernmental Organisations

Civil society has traditionally been ascribed the role of building peace and preventing conflict on the community level, whilst IGOs act as peacemakers by mediating peace negotiations between political and military elites. Unsuccessful state-centric peacebuilding initiatives, the collapse of elite pacts, and regional implications of local conflicts have led to paradigm shifts in the research and practice of conflict prevention and peace-making. The inclusive peace paradigm emphasises the need to involve civil society actors in international efforts to prevent and mitigate intrastate conflicts to foster broad-based ownership of peace initiatives, translate negotiated agreements into stable political settlements, and achieve lasting peace. The following section provides an overview of the peace research literature that underpins efforts foster civil society participation peace processes and IGOs.

19.2.1 Civil Society and Conflict Mitigation

Civil society plays a transformative role in different theoretical traditions, which ascribe intertwined democratic and peacebuilding functions to CSOs that are relevant in the context of peace negotiations and transitional governance processes. Besides articulating interests of local communities, overseeing government and diffusing pacifist and democratic norms among citizens, CSOs can build peace on the grassroots by conducting informal dialogue, Track 3 mediation and reconciliation processes, monitoring violence, offering peacebuilding training, and providing basic services (Carothers/Ottaway 2000; Belloni 2008, pp. 178–97; Barnes 2009). CSOs can transform conflict constructively and reduce violence by shifting public attitudes, addressing root-causes, defining agendas for peace, and mobilising communities for peace initiatives (Barnes 2009, pp. 131–47). Owing to these conflict-mitigating functions, civil society is equally thought to play a critical role in preventing the escalating of conflict. However, the peacebuilding role of civil society should not be romanticised as CSOs are not necessarily peace-loving. Civil society tends to consist of heterogeneous actors, who may be politically divided, rally around particularistic identities, oppose compromise, spread divisive messages, commit violence and form paramilitary groups (Barnes 2009, p. 144; Belloni 2008, pp. 178–97; Hellmüller 2020).

The inclusive peace paradigm is underpinned by the critique of state-centric liberal peacebuilding, the local turn of the 2000s that stressed the need for local ownership,

and the conflict transformation school of peacebuilding, which sees local communities rather than international actors as peacebuilders (Chesterman 2007; Heathershaw 2013). The need to promote public participation in peace-making to ensure stakeholders “owned the process” was also a major takeaway of national dialogues in South African and Northern Ireland (Barnes 2002, 2009, p. 143). More recent research has come to focus on the interactions between international and local peace actors, the relationship of peacebuilding on national and local levels, and different arenas of conflict. Internationally mediated peace-making among national elites and peacebuilding in communities are often regarded as complementary. But the sponsorship of local initiatives by international actors can undermine the agency of local actors, erode the legitimacy and relevance of interventions for communities, and foster the imposition of external agendas (Mitchell 2012, pp. 11–13; Mitchell/Hancock 2012, pp. 161–178). The interdependence of local and international interventions and conflict arenas commands research on civil society participation in the conflict prevention and mediation efforts of the APSA.

19.2.2 Civil Society Inclusion in Peace-Making

The inclusion of powerful political and military elites and armed groups, who can veto a peace process and act as spoilers, is a long-standing concern of research on international mediation and peace agreements (Nilsson/Söderberg Kovacs 2011). Normative critiques of narrow power-sharing pacts among violence-makers, who often lack democratic legitimacy, and the frequent collapse of such pacts from the background of research on inclusive peace-making, which focuses on the inclusion of non-dominant groups, including civil society actors, in negotiations, agreements and implementation processes (Sriram/Zahar 2009).

Civil society inclusion is, from a normative perspective, meant to empower communities to protect their rights and take leadership in peace processes, and give greater legitimacy to negotiations and agreements (Aulin 2019, p. 39; Hellmüller 2020; Zanker 2014, pp. 62–88). From a practical perspective, including CSOs is supposed to foster local stakeholders’ confidence in peace processes, add alternative perspectives to talks to overcome deadlocks, and prevent groups from turning against the peace process (Barnes 2009, p. 145; Bell 2019, p. 12). The principal rationale for inclusion of civil society is that the representation of a broad range of societal actors is thought to translate into local ownership of peace processes and the institutions they produce, whilst elite deals are considered unlikely to achieve sustainable peace (Barnes 2002; Carl 2019, p. 6). The theory of change that underpins the inclusive peace paradigm assumes that inclusive negotiations, agreements and implementation processes will lead to more stable political settlements that are based on a more equitable distribution of power within society. These political settlements enable a mutually acceptable *modus vivendi* among competing elites and form the basis for sustainable peace (World Bank and UN 2018, p. 22; Bell 2019, p. 11).

The inclusive peace paradigm has come to reflect in policies of the United Nations, including the Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, which aims at building “inclusive societies” (UN 2015, p. 16). Guidelines for conflict prevention and mediation of the AU and RECs have also established inclusivity as a policy norm (ECOWAS 2008; AU 2014a). In practice, however, civil society inclusion in peace-making encounters formidable obstacles. Mediators are reluctant to include additional delegations at the negotiation table as it complicates negotiations and causes selection problems. Powerful conflict parties oftentimes resist the inclusion of CSOs that lack coercive power (Paffenholz 2015, pp. 71–76).

Consultative mechanisms and other features of peace process designs can enable civil society stakeholders to participate in negotiations. National dialogue conferences permit a broad range of societal groups to directly participate in talks, but inclusive dialogues are often unfeasible in the political realities of violent conflicts (Berghof Foundation 2017). Consultations by mediators or the establishment of a Civil Society Room can permit CSOs to formally feed into negotiations, but consultative mechanisms may have little impact on the negotiation agenda (Hellmüller/Zahar 2019). Informal channels and relations with powerful negotiating parties that CSOs can use to include their demands on the agenda may outweigh their formal representation in separate delegations and consultations (Aeby 2016, pp. 717–24; Barnes 2009, p. 140; Paffenholz 2015, pp. 71–76).

Peace agreements can stipulate the participation of civil society in the implementation of provisions, and a large-N study by Nilsson suggests that peace agreements that include civil society are more sustainable (Nilsson 2012, p. 243). Whereas a 2007 study showed that few agreements mentioned civil society participation in implementation processes, (Bell/O’Rourke 2007, p. 293) IGO’s adoption of inclusivity as a policy norm may render such provisions a more frequent feature of accords. The implementation of transitional mechanisms and reforms provides more opportunities for participation than negotiations and CSOs can play a vital role in monitoring the implementation of agreements (Paladini et al. 2019, p. 35). Whether opportunities for participation materialised, thus, not only depends on the conflict actors but on the promoting of inclusive peace process designs by mediators and IGOs that sponsor agreements.

19.2.3 Civil Society Participation in Intergovernmental Organisations

The UN and African IGOs committed in their constitutive treaties and protocols to engage civil society to promote development. Whereas some organisations have dedicated structures to liaise with CSOs, others rely on NGO networks that act as implementation partners and interface between intergovernmental and local civil society organisations. Common relational models of IGOs and CSOs include the facilitation of CSO activities by IGOs, dialogue between IGOs and CSOs in joint forums,

and partnerships in which IGOs and undertake joint programmes based on mutual objectives. IGOs may outsource functions to NGOs that act as service providers or develop amalgamated structures (WANEP 2019, pp. 3–5). IGOs generally partner with NGOs that can advance their objectives and have the suitable competences, programming, leadership, governance structures, accountability procedures and verifiable impact (Rudo/Bronwen 2009; Morris/Rudy 2016; WANEP 2019, pp. 3–5). Whereas African IGOs partner with a variety of NGOs on development, the politically sensitive domain of peace and security leaves less room for co-operations (Söderbaum 2007; Morris/Rudy 2016).

The AU and RECs nonetheless partner with African NGOs that specialise in peace and security and provide expertise to develop policies, operationalise APSA structures, and analyse conflicts. The African partner NGOs, which have the necessary resources and expertise, for instance, includes ACCORD, whose embedded staff supported the secretariat of the AU Panel of the Wise. The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation was instrumental in developing the AU's Transitional Justice Policy. Femmes Africa Solidarité promotes women's leadership in AU conflict prevention and peace-making efforts. The Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) issues APSA assessment reports and trains AU officials. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) is on the AU roster for technical experts on reconciliation. (Murithi 2018, pp. 13–23). The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) monitors the PSC and supports AU programmes ranging from early warning to peacekeeping. This includes the Training for Peace (TfP) programme to strengthen peacekeeping capacity. The Life and Peace Institute partners with the AU and IGAD on conflict prevention and peacebuilding in North-East Africa. Oxfam, which is headquartered in Nairobi, has an AU Liaison Office and a Peace, Security and Humanitarian Affairs Programme. The West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) is ECOWAS' principal partner for early warning and as entered a partnership with the AU (Aeby 2021, p. 15; Murithi 2018, pp. 13–23).

Whereas African NGOs and academics inform the development of APSA structures and their responses to conflicts, such partnerships involve great challenges. Since NGOs and IGOs are donor-dependent, their partnerships and the outsourcing of functions to NGOs are susceptible to changing donor agendas. Most importantly, some African states are suspicious of CSOs and their participation in the APSA (Aeby 2021, p. 15).

19.3 African Union

The AU has developed an elaborate policy and institutional framework for conflict prevention and peace-making, but the development of the corresponding infrastructure lags behind and the policies on civil society participation contain ambiguities. The Constitutive Act of the African Union established the Economic Social and Culture Council (ECOSOCC) to interface and partner with civil society (AU 2002, p. 22). Since this model has proven unviable to partner with expert African NGOs,

the AU Commission (AUC) and PSC have adopted a more flexible approach. AU mediation guidelines declare inclusivity a mediation principle, but the application of these recommendations hinges on the will of mediators and conflict parties (AU 2014a, pp. 48–51; AU 2014b). The section outlines the AU's policy framework for civil society participation, involvement of NGOs in AU structures, and channels local CSOs can use to engage in AU-facilitated peace processes.

19.3.1 AU Policy Framework

The constitutive documents of the AU, strategic policy plans, as well as mediation guidelines entail provisions relating to both, the involvement of partner NGOs in structures for prevention and peace-making as well as the inclusion of local civil society stakeholders in peace processes.

The 2002 Constitutive Act and the 2003 Protocol on the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council envisage that NGOs participate actively in efforts to promote peace, security and stability, including early warning and research (AU 2002, p. 22). For this purpose, the 2004 Statute of the ECOSOCC establishes a Peace and Security Committee, which was meant to be the principal interlocutor for corresponding issues. To be eligible to ECOSOCC, however, CSOs must not only be registered in AU member states and share the AU's objectives but draw 50% of their resources from membership contributions (AU 2004). Whereas these criteria were meant to ensure African ownership, they effectively barred vast sections of African civil society from participating in the AU because well-capacitated NGOs, like the AUC itself, usually depend on donor assistance (Aeby 2021, p. 19).

The 2008 Livingstone Formula, which the PSC adopted to regulate its interactions with CSOs, envisaged civil society participation in early warning analysis, mediation support, training, civilian aspects of peacekeeping, local peacebuilding, humanitarian relief and post-conflict reconstruction. However, the PSC resolution underscored the primacy of the ECOSOCC and applicability of its eligibility criteria for NGOs to contribute to the work of the PSC and Peace and Security Department (PSD) (AU 2008). These rules would effectively prevent the PSD from cooperating with important African NGOs, which have relevant expertise on peace and security, and the PSC from interacting with CSOs from conflict-affected states. The 2013 Maseru Conclusions, therefore, introduced the principles of relevance and flexibility, which were henceforth applied to enable the PSD to work with suitable NGOs based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). However, the Maseru Conclusions reaffirmed the ECOSOCC criteria, thus, perpetuating uncertainties and grey arease (AU 2014b).

Strategic policy plans, including the APSA Roadmap 2016-2020, Agenda 2063 and Silencing the Guns report, declare the objectives of enabling citizen participation, fostering collective ownership of a common vision for the AU, and developing plentiful partnerships with civil society and academia to prevent and mitigate violence. Yet, the plans do not give guidance on how these objectives can be actualised. The

2017 report on “The Imperative to Strengthen Our Union”, which was produced under Paul Kagame’s leadership to inform a comprehensive reform of the AUC, candidly states that the AU must become more relevant to citizens. But it omits reforms to the framework for civil society participation (Kagame 2017, 10). The ECOSOCC Statute, thus, remains in place although the experience since its enactment shows that it is impractical, inhibits rather than enables participation, and, thus, contradict the AU’s strategic policy objectives (Aeby 2021, p. 19; ISS 2019).

A series of mediation guidelines and standard operating procedures for mediation support, which the AU developed in recent years with the assistance of consultants from African and international NGOs, detail that experts from NGOs may contribute to mediation training, advise mediators to design peace processes and agreements, facilitate multitrack dialogues, and assist the management of mediation knowledge by retaining lessons from missions and conducting research (AU 2012, 2014a, 2016a; Nathan 2009). Whilst such co-operations are possible thanks to the principles of flexibility and relevance introduced by the Maseru Conclusions, the AU could eliminate ambiguities in its policy framework by abandoning the ECOSOCC Statute (Aeby 2021, p. 19).

19.3.2 AU Policy Framework for Local CSO’s Inclusion in Peace Processes

The organisational mandate of the Constitutive Act to engage civil society and the objective of policy plans to involve citizens command that local CSOs be included in peace processes. In terms of the PSC Protocol, the Council shall consult or invite CSOs that are involved in conflict situations to address meetings (AU 2002, p. 8). Whereas inclusivity constitutes an AU mediation principle in terms of the 2014 AU Mediation Support Handbook, the guidelines to include local CSOs in AU-facilitated dialogues constitute non-binding recommendations. CSOs are generally projected as stakeholders who must be consulted rather than included at the negotiation table (AU 2014a, pp. 7–10). The 2008 Plan of Action to strengthen the AU’s mediation capacity advises mediators to consult CSOs because their direct representation in talks is often unfeasible (Nathan 2009, p. 16). The 2012 Standard Operating Procedures for Mediation Support instruct mediation teams to identify CSOs in conflict analyses and spell out mediation objectives for these stakeholders. The duty of consult CSOs lies with the lead mediator (AU 2012, pp. 6–37). An AU reader on Managing Peace Processes lists rationales, obstacles and modalities to include CSOs alongside political business actors in negotiations (AU 2013, 3:39–62). The Mediation Handbook advises mediators to strike a balance between keeping negotiations manageable by limiting the number of delegations and making them more legitimate by including many stakeholders. Whilst alluding to national dialogues, the Handbook equally treats CSOs as additional actors, who must be consulted, rather than delegations at the negotiating table (AU 2014a, pp. 63, 73).

19.3.3 AU-CSO Interface: ECOSOCC

The ECOSOCC, as Murithi shows, was included in the 2002 Constitutive Act of the AU owing to pressure by civic groups, who demanded that the AU architecture include a civil society interface (Murithi 2005, p. 112–36). Although the 2004 Statute established that CSOs would need to be ECOSOCC members to contribute to the work of the AUC, the operationalisation of the 150-member Council and its organs proved slow and its Peace and Security Committee was still not functional by 2015 (Amr 2012, p. 176). The Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) in the Office of the AUC Chair served as ECOSOCC’s secretariat and connection to AU organs until 2019, when an ECOSOCC Secretariat was set up in Lusaka. The latter is hoped to breathe life into the Council. In 2017, the ECOSOCC started consultations on Silencing the Guns and violent extremism (Aeby 2021, p. 21; Lwizi 2019). Yet, in 2019, an ISS report concluded that the ECOSOCC was “dysfunctional” and impeded civil society’s access to the PSC (ISS 2019, p. 8).

The civil society interface remains hamstrung the fundamental design flaws of its Statute. It is widely acknowledged that the ECOSOCC’s restrictive membership criteria exclude vast sections of African civil society and, thus, undermine rather than grow African ownership of AU institutions (Aeby 2021, p. 21; Rudo/Bronwen 2009, 27; Nathan et al. 2015, p. 152). Since donor-assisted expert NGOs are ineligible, the represented CSOs have lacked expertise to inform peace and security policy. The ECOSOCC has a passive advisory role and responds to request by AUC departments rather than to proactively initiate policy initiatives. The Councils’ representativity was further limited by the fact that only 26 of 55 AU member states set up ECOSOCC chapters (Aeby 2021, 21; Amr 2012, pp. 172–83; Nathan et al. 2015, p. 150; ECOSOCC 2020). Authoritarian governments sought to deploy CSOs that echo their positions. Many African CSOs shun the ECOSOCC owing to these limitations, its marginal influence and the perception that states do not take the council seriously. Instead, they resort to other channels to influence decision-making in the AU. Whereas a review of the ECOSOCC Statute may ease these grievances, a platform that is independently managed by civil society would be better suited to ensure access and gain the trust of CSOs (Aeby 2021, p. 21).

19.3.4 AU Peace and Security Council

In principle, the PSC could invite CSOs that met the ECOSOCC criteria to address its sessions based on the 2008 Livingstone Formula, which it adopted owing to the recognition that its proceedings could benefit from CSOs input and sustained lobbying by NGOs (Aeby 2021, 21) But meetings between ECOSOCC and the PSC failed to take place because, as the ECOSOCC stated in 2018, the Livingstone Formula was never operationalised (ECOSOCC 2018). The application of the principle of flexibility from 2013 onwards enabled the PSC to consult relevant think tanks and local CSOs.

Such direct briefings henceforth became an important channel for CSOs to inform the AU's decision-making organ on peace and security. However, member states could prevent critical civil society voices from addressing the council, and a database for "relevant" CSOs had not materialised by early 2020 (Aeby 2021, pp. 21–23).

Submissions to the PSC Chair, who sets the agenda, the AUC Chair, who mandates mediators, the Commissioner for Peace and Security, who directs the PSD; and Permanent Representatives of member states can constitute an important channel to inform decision-makers. Whether such submissions stand a chance to inform deliberations depends on their quality and CSOs' reputation. A crucial way to inform PSC deliberations is to share analyses with embassies and representatives of member states. Well-capacitated NGOs with offices in Addis Ababa monitor and analyse the PSC agenda to proactively produce demand-oriented analyses, which can be easily absorbed by the relevant decision-makers (Aeby 2021, pp. 21–23).

19.3.5 AU Continental Early Warning System

Serving as a nerve centre that gathers information on conflict risks to alert the AUC Chair and PSC, (AU 2014a, p. 14) the situation room of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) analyses data from reports, news clippings and the early warning systems of RECs. The CEWS has in recent years increased its analytical capacity, but the early warning centres of some RECs that are not fully operational. Translating early warning information into prompt action by political decision-makers remains a formidable challenge. Early warning information is not widely shared in the AUC as states that deny conflict risks respond sensitively if they appear on its radar (Aeby 2021, p. 22; Arthur 2017, 10; ISS 2017; Noyes/Yarwood 2013, p. 251).

The CEWS was operationalised with the support of ISS. (Aeby 2021, p. 23) In line with the Livingstone Formula that envisages early warning collaborations, (AU 2008, para. 10) the CEWS leverages conflict analyses by think tanks (Aeby 2021, p. 23; ISS 2017). After entering an MOU in 2018, WANEP deployed a liaison officer to link its West African to the continental system (WANEP 2019, p. 43). The CEWS has since entered collaborations with further Africa NGOs and provides training to civil society actors (Aeby 2021, p. 23).

19.3.6 AU Panel of the Wise

In terms of the PSC Protocol, the five eminent members of the Panel of the Wise (PoW) have a mandate to advise the PSC and engage in preventive diplomacy (AU 2014a, p. 14; Gomes Porto/Ngandu 2014, p. 185). The PoW and equivalent panels of RECs are linked through the PanWise network, which has been inactive in recent years although having enabled fruitful collaborations in the past (Aeby 2021, p. 23; Nathan et al. 2015, p. 8). In 2017, the structures were completed with FemWise

Africa to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation (Ngandu 2017). FemWise has gained considerable traction and serves to train and deploy women mediators, who are recruited from among local peacebuilders, to facilitate multitrack dialogues (Aeby 2021, p. 23).

The PoW was operationalised in 2007 with the assistance of peacebuilding NGOs. ACCORD seconded staff to its PoW secretariat until 2018, when the AU decided it should be self-reliant. ISS and TFP continued to provide technical assistance to the PoW to organise high-level dialogues on Silencing the Guns, whilst IPSS supported training for senior officials (Aeby 2021, p. 23). The International Peace Institute and ACCORD assisted the production of the PoW's thematic reports (AU 2014a, 14; AU 2019; de Carvalho 2017, p. 8).

When undertaking missions to a total of nine countries between 2007 and 2015 to advise the PSC and meet stakeholders, mostly in the context of elections, the PoW engaged in consultations with local CSOs, thereby providing a vital channel to civil society to inform conflict prevention efforts (Apuuli 2018, 160; Gomes Porto/Ngandu 2014, pp. 188–94). However, a 2014 APSA assessment found that the PoW did not sufficiently interact with CSOs and the PSC did not appropriately follow up on its recommendations. (Gomes Porto/Ngandu 2014, p. 197; Nathan et al. 2015, p. 8). The members of the PoW, whose term began in 2018, have been prevented from embarking on preventive missions as states turned down their good offices. Whereas the underutilisation of the PoW deprives local CSOs of an important channel, the locally recruited FemWise mediators provide new opportunities for communities to feed into multitrack dialogues (Aeby 2021, p. 23).

19.3.7 AU Mediation Support Unit

The small Mediation Support Unit (MSU) launched in April 2019 with a mandate to backstop mediators, build mediation capacity, manage mediation knowledge, and network with relevant actors. The development of mediation support structures in the AU started over a decade earlier with the support of international and African NGOs that specialise in mediation: The NGOs promoted the buy-in of stakeholders to create the MSU by presenting a vision and convincing AU officials, states and development partners of the added value; facilitated the transfer of research-based knowledge and best-practice standards in initial trainings; drafted instruments for procedures, mediation principles, job descriptions and resource requirements; and provided critical analyses of the operationalisation process. The involvement of NGOs also bore challenges: African leadership was limited as few African NGOs had expertise on mediation support, meaning that many instruments were drafted by European NGOs. Since expert NGOs must be entrepreneurial to secure contracts with IGOs and donors, they have an interest in carving a niche for themselves when designing APSA institutions. NGOs can also foster organisational consistencies by wooing different actors and divisions in the AU Commission. Norms that NGOs carry into guidelines and training documents they design, may not be shared and put into practice by mediators

and support teams. Crucially, if the development of new structures is mainly driven by NGOs and donors, they risk lacking the necessary buy-in of political decision-makers to function properly (Aeby 2021, p. 24).

The planning of mediation missions by the MSU left little room for NGO participation, except for the provision of analytical inputs. The nascent MSU worked with expert consultants from African NGOs to develop its capacity-building programme and local civil society actors were among the recipients of trainings for FemWise mediators. A Knowledge Management Framework to retain and produce comparative mediation knowledge was produced with the assistance of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), but the MSU lacked resources to put a knowledge-management system into practice. A partnership with African research institutes would permit the outsourcing of tedious research in a hybrid knowledge-management system. Similarly, experts from African NGOs could populate a roster for technical experts who can support mediators to design peace processes and draft agreements as the AU lacks the resources to maintain a standby panel of experts as in the UN (Aeby 2021, pp. 24–30).

19.3.8 Inclusion of Local CSOs in AU Mediations

Whereas AU mediation guidelines propose inclusive peace process designs, the feasibility and application of inclusion mechanisms to permit a wider range of societal actors to participate in peace negotiations depends on the conflict situation, mediation mandate, personality of the lead mediator, and whether the AU or a REC leads a mediation effort. AU mediators nowadays routinely hold consultations with civic stakeholders during mediation missions and consider their position papers. Such direct consultations are, according to AU official and NGO practitioners, an effective channel to inform both the mediation agenda and mediators' reports to the AUC Chair and PSC. Whilst consultations are standard, the processing and integration of contributions by consulted civil society actors into the mediation agenda remains a challenge. For practical reasons, lead mediators can only consult a limited number of CSOs, and AU missions cannot liaise with civil society actors without the approval of governments that may regard such consultations as an interference in internal affairs. The MSU may prove instrumental in streamlining the processing of inputs and consulting local CSOs to analyse conflicts and map stakeholders ahead of future mediation missions (Aeby 2021, p. 29).

AU Liaison Offices and Special Representatives, who have a longer-term presence in conflict-affected countries, provide a key channel for local CSOs to inform mediations as AU mediators rely on their knowledge of conflicts and stakeholders. Whereas Special Representatives can give local CSOs credibility, peacebuilding NGOs share their analyses with Liaison Offices, using them as an access point to raise concerns within the AU system (Aeby 2021, p. 29). By 2016, the AU had established 17 Liaison Offices, whose mandate included reaching out “to people on the ground”

(AU 2016b). However, this vital access point was unavailable in states that opposed a longer-term AU presence (Aeby 2021, p. 29).

FemWise can provide additional access points for local CSOs to feed into AU mediations. FemWise aims at multitrack mediations that enable communities to participate in dialogues. FemWise mediators are well-placed to serve as conduits between local CSOs and the AU as they are peacebuilders from communities. The impact such multitrack mediations make on the negotiations and the content of agreements is to be seen (Aeby 2021, p. 29).

Whilst CSOs may use the above channels, civil society inclusion in AU-facilitated peace processes encounters formidable technical and political obstacles. Local CSOs often lack resources, communication skills and knowledge on technical issues and the AU system to make an impact on peace processes. To participate in peace processes and inform mediations, they may depend on well-capacitated NGOs that liaise with AU organs. Civil society tends to be the weakest in war-torn and authoritarian states that curtail civic freedoms. The biggest obstacle to civil society inclusion in AU-facilitated peace processes is the distrust of governments that regard civil society activists as a threat, Western proxies and un-African (Aeby 2021, p. 29).

19.4 Economic Community of West African States

ECOWAS began to elaborate its peace and security institutions prior to the creation of the APSA in response to civil wars in the 1990s (Adetula et al. 2016, p. 21). ECOWAS' policies envisage a highly inclusive approach to conflict prevention and peace-making, but not all relevant structures are operational (ECOWAS 2008). The ECOWAS Commission provides a variety of access points for civil society and partners with regional networks that serve as interfaces for local CSOs and bolster its early warning capacity. Whereas ECOWAS mediators routinely consult local stakeholders, CSOs' access to ECOWAS structures and mediations is uneven (Aeby 2021, p. 33).

19.4.1 ECOWAS Policy Framework

The constitutive documents, policy plans and mediation guidelines of ECOWAS prioritise conflict prevention and enshrine a comprehensive framework for NGOs' involvement in ECOWAS structures and the inclusion of local CSOs in peace processes. The revised ECOWAS Treaty of 1993 added the prevention and resolution of intrastate conflicts to the mandate of the organisation, which was founded in 1975, but only envisaged civil society participation to advance economic integration (ECOWAS 1993). According to the 1999 Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, which established ECOWAS' peace and security architecture, the Council of the Wise must include civic leaders,

whilst special envoys and the ECOWAS Commission must coordinate interventions with relevant NGOs (ECOWAS 1999). The 2008 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) introduced a bottom-up approach to conflict prevention and transformation and firmly established a human security paradigm. The ECPF envisages collaborations between ECOWAS, NGOs and states across the board, including early warning, preventive diplomacy, matters of democratic governance, human rights, the rule of law, natural resource governance, cross-border initiatives, security sector governance, disarmament, the ECOWAS Standby Force, humanitarian assistance, women peace and security, youth empowerment, and peace education. According to the comprehensive strategic plan, ECOWAS shall facilitate creative conflict transformation interventions that are led by civil society and states (ECOWAS 2008, pp. 9, 69, 72). The ECPF describes CSOs as bona fide partners and stipulates that ECOWAS shall partner with NGO networks based on MOUs, so they can contribute to policy-development and implementation, channel civil society concerns, and spearhead prevention and peacebuilding in member states (ECOWAS 2008, pp. 9, 25, 69, 72, 74). The role of NGOs in ECOWAS peace-making efforts is detailed in the 2019 ECOWAS Dialogue and Mediation Handbook, which emphasises multitrack mediations that may be led by NGOs and highlights examples of dialogues that were facilitated by WANEP and women's networks (ECOWAS 2017, pp. 25, 53, 59, 72). Overall, ECOWAS policies and guidelines, thus, provide very strong foundations for NGO's involvement in prevention and peace-making.

The ECOWAS Mechanism also provides for the inclusion of civil society in peace processes by stipulating the Special Representatives of the ECOWAS President must liaise with relevant CSOs (ECOWAS 1999). Whilst focusing on civil society-led interventions, according to the ECPF, ECOWAS and states should mobilise local CSOs to assist mediations (ECOWAS 2008, p. 25). The 2018 ECOWAS Mediation Guidelines establish inclusive mediation as a mediation principle. The Guidelines recommend that not only primary conflict parties, but all relevant political, armed and social groups, including those who oppose a peace process, should be considered as participants of dialogues. Reflecting the inclusive peace paradigm, the Guidelines, which were drafted with the assistance of Finland's Conflict Management Initiative, suggest that inclusion contributes to effective negotiations by assuring the buy-in of stakeholders and the public, encouraging parties to make peace, enriching negotiation agendas, and increasing the legitimacy and sustainability of agreements. CSOs that may be represented in negotiations can hail from all segments of civil society, including trade unions, religious organisations and women's groups (ECOWAS 2018, p. 55). The Dialogue and Mediation Handbook projects local CSOs as participants in multitrack dialogues, stakeholders who may be consulted, recipients of training, and catalysts to grow public support for peace processes. Local CSOs are, thus, seen as participants in dialogues, workshops and consultations on Track 2 and 3 rather than delegations alongside the main conflict actors on Track 1 or in national dialogue conferences (ECOWAS 2017, pp. 53, 56, 57, 89).

19.4.2 ECOWAS' Civil Society Interface and Major Access Points

The West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF) was launched in 2003 to serve as the official interface for CSOs to liaise with the ECOWAS Commission. Since then, the Commission has entered partnerships with a variety of NGOs and introduced additional access points, including the Human Security and Civil Society Division (HSCSD) and ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework Secretariat.

Unlike the AU, ECOWAS has traditionally relied on an independent civil society network, WACSOF, as the primary interface for civil society. The vulnerability of the interface model was illustrated in 2014 when internal organisational problems incapacitated WACSOF. Whilst WACSOF underwent a change in leadership, ECOWAS renewed its commitment to the partnership. ECOWAS' financial support to the NGO network, however, raised concern among civil society actors over its ability to deal critique at ECOWAS. Despite its vulnerability, the interface model, which builds on an independent civil society network, is better suited to give CSOs a credible platform than an organ of an intergovernmental organisation. The ECOWAS Commission has, moreover, concluded MOUs with an array of West African NGOs research institutes on a needs-basis. In the domain of conflict prevention and peace-making, WANEP has become ECOWAS' primary partner. The combination of a membership of over 500 grassroots CSOs and well-capacitated structures of an expert peacebuilding NGO give WANEP a unique competitive advantage (Aeby 2021, p. 35).

In 2019, the ECOWAS Commission introduced the HSCSD, which oversees the engagement of civil society for the entire organisation. Whilst being located in the Department of Social Affairs and Gender rather than the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security, the HSCSD, is responsible for matters of human security, including women, peace and security, the protection of displaced persons, vulnerable children, and human trafficking. For this purpose, it collaborated with the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre and sectoral CSOs, The HSCSD devised a strategy to broaden ECOWAS' engagement with CSO and promoted the mainstreaming of gender in prevention and peace processes and was instrumental in launching FemWise ECOWAS. The modalities for the deployment of ECOWAS' FemWise Component, were, however, yet to be determined in 2020 (Aeby 2021, p. 35).

The ECPF Secretariat is a further important access point for CSOs and was established in 2015 to promote the implementation of the ECPF, review progress, coordinate stakeholders and mobilise resources. It has close ties to WANEP and holds meetings in the 15 member states to sensitise state, business and civil society actors to the plan. Starting in October 2019, the ECPF conducted a Youths for Peace Programme together with WANEP and states' youth ministries, which comprised training and national youth dialogues (Aeby 2021, p. 35).

19.4.3 ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council

The Mediation and Security Council (MSC), which comprises 10 ambassadors, is the standing decision-making organ for peace and security according to the Mechanism (ECOWAS 1999). Unlike the PSC or UN Security Council that respond to pressing crises, the MSC only meets twice a year alongside the ECOWAS Authority. Urgent decisions, such as the deployment of mediators, are made by the ECOWAS president in consultation with the ambassadors. CSOs cannot address the MSC, but WANEP started to provide quarterly briefing sessions to the ambassadors on the situation in the region in 2019. The objective of the briefings is to complement early warning reports with analyses that must not abide political imperatives. For this purpose, WANEP issues independent reports that the NGO shares with the ambassadors (Aeby 2021, p. 36).

19.4.4 ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network

With a central situation room, five national centres, 77 field monitors, including 15 from WANEP, in 15 states, the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network is Africa's most sophisticated early warning system. The operationalisation of additional national centres to replace regional centres was underway in 2020. WANEP is an integral part of ECOWARN and an embedded Liaison Officer at the ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate coordinates its civil society component. National early warning system managers at each of WANEP's 15 national offices collect information according to a distinct set of indicators. They feed data from WANEP's independent West African Early Warning and Response Network (WARN), which comprises up to 20 community monitors per country, into ECOWARN. The combination of information that is gathered by ECOWARN and civil society permits the triangulation of data on issues such as the role of state actors in conflicts. Besides feeding into ECOWARN, WANEP issues independent opensource reports for CSOs and political actors (Aeby 2021, p. 36).

ECOWARN's outstanding qualities include its human security indicators, adaptation to sub-regional risks, mixed methods, and ability to respond to conflicts on the national level. By partnering with WANEP and leveraging WARN to operationalise ECOWARN, the ECOWAS Commission demonstrated the commitment to civil society participation. According to Amandine Gnanguênon, ECOWARN has fostered a culture of prevention, human security, transparency and participation in ECOWAS (Gnanguênon 2018).

ECOWARN encounters enduring challenges that relate to the complexity of indicators, data quality, new types of conflict risks and using data for policymaking. Most importantly, the political process of translating early warning into timely responses to conflict risks is opaque. The reliance on a singular civil society network

that has the relevant early warning capacity in the region represents a considerable vulnerability as ECOWARN would be heavily affected if WANEP experienced organisational problems. Despite the partnership that is based on mutual trust and ECOWAS' commitment to civil society participation, continued state-centric security approaches by political actors and bureaucracy complicate the coordination of the governmental and civil society component of the system. The integration of WANEP structures into the ECOWAS system, moreover, implies a sensitive trade-off for the NGO's independence, as civil society monitors have no hand in the response to early warning signs by political actors (Aeby 2021, p. 36).

19.4.5 Council of the Wise

The ECOWAS Council of the Wise (CoW), unlike the AU PoW, has an unequivocal mandate for both mediation and preventive diplomacy (ECOWAS 1999). The CoW became operational in 2001, embarked on fact finding missions to raise conflict risks with the ECOWAS President, and undertook joint activities with the PoW (ICG 2016, p. 6). However, despite its achievements, in recent years, the council remained defunct and an effort to review its statute that started in 2016 was yet to be completed in 2020 (ECOWAS 2016). The reinstatement of this key structure of the Mechanism, which must comprise eminent civil society leaders, was hampered by a lack of political and financial support. In the absence of the CoW, ECOWAS relied on Special Representatives of the President as mediators. The omission to reconstitute the Council impeded the development of ECOWAS' mediation system and deprived civil society of an important pillar to contribute to conflict prevention and peace-making in ECOWAS (Aeby 2021, p. 37).

19.4.6 ECOWAS Mediation Facilitation Division

The development of the The Mediation Facilitation Division (MFD) was initiated in 2007 and it became operational in 2015. (Odigie 2016, p. 4) NGOs were involved in the operationalisation process from the onset, whereby WANEP participated in preliminary discussions, whilst the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue drove the needs assessment through which its terms of reference were drafted. WACSOF, WANEP and the West African Civil Society Institute (WACSI), amongst others, gave input in workshops. Whereas the involvement of NGOs posed few challenges thanks to already existing partnerships, the initial set of mediation support instruments were drafted by European NGOs and not optimally adjusted to the West African context.

International NGOs also took the lead in drafting training instruments for the MFD's capacity-building programmes, and trainings for high-level officials were facilitated by the Clingendael Institute and Legon Centre. WANEP, meanwhile, assisted the rollout of a comprehensive training programme for over 470 actors

from state and non-state entities across the region. The planning and backstopping of the numerous mediation missions which the MFD supported since 2015, was too political sensitive for NGOs to be involved, but the MFD used WANEP and ECOWARN reports. Whereas ambitious plans to establish a mediation resource centre to manage mediation knowledge did not materialise, the MSU collaborated with NGOs to exchange and disseminate knowledge, for instance, through ACCORD publications and by contributing to research by IJR. A roster for technical experts to backstop mediators was still the subject of discussions, in which the Kofi Anan Peacebuilding Training Centre participated. WANEP moreover managed the roster for FemWise mediators, who had been trained with WANEP's assistance (Aeby 2021, pp. 37–42).

19.4.7 Inclusion of Local Civil Society Actors in ECOWAS Mediations

ECOWAS-mandated mediators generally consulted a wide range of local stakeholders during missions. WANEP played an intermediary role by assisting mediation teams to identify stakeholders who needed to be consulted and facilitating consultations by giving local CSOs access to ECOWAS representatives. This included the prevention and mending of electoral conflicts, whereby WANEP set up Election Situation Rooms to monitor risks. Whereas the ECOWAS MFD consulted local women mediators, WANEP was facilitated dialogue on Track 2 and 3 together with its affiliates. In the case of Guinea Bissau, WANEP's director, who served as the advisor on mediation and dialogue to the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, acted as contact point between CSOs, ECOWAS and the UN, and directly supported mediation efforts that were mandated by a regional contact group. In Côte d'Ivoire, WANEP assisted the monitoring of the negotiated accord (Aeby 2021, p. 40).

Consultations with local CSOs and WANEP's intermediary role bore challenges. The coordination, consistency and frequency of consultations and the efficient handling of inputs to inform mediation agendas left room for improvement. The inclusion of local CSOs' concerns on the mediation agenda and the ability of WANEP to facilitate consultations hinged on the personality and will of the ECOWAS mediator. Where sitting presidents were appointed mediators, the inclusion of civil society generally proved most difficult. Mediators' divergent objectives towards conflicts and state-centric imperatives impeded WANEP's ability to facilitate consultations. WANEP was well-placed to function as intermediary thanks to its network and local knowledge, but the NGO assumed an inadvertent gatekeeper role for local CSOs, making it easier for WANEP affiliates to access mediation teams (Aeby 2021, p. 40).

19.5 Southern African Development Community

SADC replaced the Southern African Development Coordination Conference in 1994. Its Organ on Politics Defence and Security emerged from the defensive Frontlines States Alliance in 1996. Both predecessors had served to coordinate resistance against the South African apartheid regime that destabilised the region and their major legacy consisted in an anti-imperialist ethos of the organisation that is dominated by former liberation party governments (Khadiagala 2012, pp. 26–35). The development of SADC's peace and security institutions, including the mediation infrastructure, faltered. Relations between some member states and civil society were characterised by suspicion, but SADC nevertheless partnered with selected NGO networks. Policies on conflict management require SADC to engage civil society, but corresponding mechanisms were not operationalised. Whilst NGO participation in institutions for prevention and peace-making was minimal, the inclusion of local CSOs in SADC-facilitated peace processes varied sharply (Aeby 2021, p. 44).

19.5.1 SADC Policy Framework

The revised SADC Treaty of 2001 entails an organisational mandate to consolidate, defend and maintain democracy, peace and stability in the region, whereby SADC should involve the people of the region and key stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector. In the SADC Treaty, member states committed to establish SADC National Committees, which should comprise the key stakeholders to enable citizens to interact with SADC to oversee and initiate policymaking (SADC 2001).

The Strategic Indicative Plan of the Organ (SIPO) was first introduced in 2002 and developed by security officials with little input from think tanks and without meaningful consultations with CSOs (van Nieuwkerk 2013, p. 149; van Nieuwkerk 2014, p. 149). SIPO postulated that the Organ should encourage civil society to contribute to conflict prevention, management and resolution without outlining an action plan (SADC 2002, p. 19). When SIPO II was introduced in 2010, accredited civil society networks were invited to comment on the final draft that was produced without the assistance of security think tanks (Aeby 2021, p. 44). SIPO II remained in effect beyond its initial lifespan that expired in 2010 although being partly outdated at its adoption (van Nieuwkerk 2013, p. 150). Whilst lacking a business plan to achieve objectives in the domains of politics, defence, state security, public policy and police, SIPO II, whose implementation would include the development of SADC's APSA component, reflected a shift towards a human security paradigm (SADC 2010, 2; van Nieuwkerk 2013, 150; Aeby 2019, p. 35). According to SIPO II, SADC strategies to "prevent, contain and resolve intrastate conflict by peaceful means" should lead to "enhanced participation of civil society." The Organ should consider collaborations with regional research institutions to exchange experiences, undertake studies, and organise discussions on the involvement of civil society in Organ activities (SADC

2010, pp. 23 – 35). The modalities of such collaborations would need to be elaborated in a future strategic plan.

19.5.2 SADC's Civil Society Interface

SADC National Committees, which should be the main civil society interface in terms of the Treaty, were, either hard to access, unknown to stakeholders or defunct in most SADC member states. This was not only a missed opportunity to involve citizens in SADC's work, but according to Dimpho Motsamai, national committees could, in principle, provide a platform for SADC envoys to include local civil society actors in prevention and mediation efforts (Motsamai 2018, pp. 102–105).

Rather than the National Committees, three accredited networks acted as NGOs, labour unions and religious organisations respectively: The SADC Council of NGOs (SADC-CNGO), the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC), and the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA) (Hulse et al. 2018). Thanks to sustained efforts spearheaded by SADC-CNGO, the SADC Secretariat became gradually more accessible to CSOs. CNGO, which maintained a peace and security programme, set up a mediation task team in 2012 to link it to the mediation structure SADC set out to operationalise, support local mediation initiatives and provide training. Thanks to an MOU with the SADC Secretariat and sustained relationship-building with SADC executives, SADC-CNGO could open channels to provide input to policymaking. But even the accredited networks could only engage the inaccessible Secretariat, which in itself has little authority within the SADC architecture, on a point-to-point basis. Access depended heavily on personal relations and contributions tended to make little impact on policies (Aeby 2021, p. 46).

SADC-CNGO saw a sharp decline in its organisational capacity and had to terminate the mediation programme following internal challenges and a cut in donor assistance. The SADC case, thus, illustrates the vulnerability of the interface model that depends on an independent network to organisational constraints of NGOs. A further limitation results from the fact that national NGO councils, who are the intermediary between SADC-CNGO and local CSOs, are only partially representative in countries like Zimbabwe where civil society is politically divided. Some CSOs attempt to engage the SADC Secretariat directly or via alternative regional networks. However, CSOs often lack the understanding of SADC's workings and resources to effectively inform conflict prevention and peace-making (Aeby 2016, 708; Aeby 2021, p. 46).

Since the mid-2000s. SADC-CNGO and its partners, who convene the annual SADC Civil Society Forum, advocated the creation of a SADC Non-State Actor Mechanism to enable a more structure engagement with the Secretariat. These efforts prompted SADC to commission the Southern Africa Trust (SAT) to draft a proposal for a Mechanism that resembles the AU ECOSOCC and was in principle approved by the Council of Ministers in 2016 (Southern Africa Trust 2018). Whereas the

proposal was later amended to include the work of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security in the thematic scope of the Mechanism, the Ministerial Committee of the Organ was yet to decide on the plan in 2020. A business actor platform was, meanwhile, promptly operationalised. The Non-State Actor Mechanism was hoped to enable a continuous and transparent engagement with SADC with clear feedback processes. In the worst case, the Mechanism would serve to feign civil society participation without meaningful impact on policies and to select CSOs that were deemed acceptable or exercised self-censorship (Aeby 2021, p. 47).

19.5.3 SADC Summit and Organ Troika

In the SADC architecture, the Summit of Head and State plays an immediate role in responding to conflicts, while the Organ Troika serves as primary decision-making body between Summit meetings. Both bodies are made up of heads of states, who hold closed meetings, and have no formal consultative mechanisms (Aeby 2019, p. 22). Whereas the annual Civil Society Forum and ordinary Summit take place at the same time, lobbying political decision-makers during the Summit was not a viable strategy. To inform SADC decisions, NGOs targeted receptive liberal democratic governments, South African in particular. During Namibia's tenure, NGOs that sought to raise concerns relating to the political crisis in Zimbabwe, were afforded a meeting with the SADC Chair. South African-based NGOs moreover cultivate relations with the Department of International Relations and Cooperation to inform SADC-mandated mediations. NGOs also seek to inform South Africa's policy on conflicts in SADC by advocating their positions through the government party, its trade union partners and the media (Aeby 2016, p. 707; Aeby 2021, p. 47).

19.5.4 Regional Early Warning Centre

The SADC Regional Early Warning Centre (REWC) should contribute to conflict prevention, management and resolution and, according to the APSA blueprint, feed into the CEWS (Hendricks/Musavengana 2010, 19; SADC 2020). However, the secretive REWC consisted of a small situation room, focused on state intelligence rather than human security, and lack resources. In practice, REWC was neither integrated into the CEWS, nor did it contribute information to support SADC mediations. Since the REWC was an intelligence organ, its staff included operatives who were recruited from central intelligence organisations of states. In the case of Zimbabwe, the Central Intelligence Organisation had a track record of abducting and killing civil society activists (ICG 2011, p. 3; Sachikonye 2012, 36; Human Rights Watch 2014, 6, p. 22). The REWC was, thus, neither fit to support prevention and peace-making nor to partner with civil society. It would need to be replaced with system that focuses

on human security indicators, feeds data into the CEWS and produces analyses for SADC's mediation infrastructure.

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), whose membership overlaps with SADC, has a human security-centred early warning system that feeds into the CEWS, but an independent civil society early warning system for Southern Africa does presently not exist (Porto Gomes 2013). Southern African NGOs would be well-placed to develop a civil society-based early warning system, such as West Africa's WARN, thanks to the technical expertise of think tanks that support the APSA, the relatively progressed regional integration of civil society, the existence of NGO networks that monitor issues pertaining to elections, gender and conflict, and the experiences gained by monitoring historic peace processes.

19.5.5 SADC Panel of Elders and Mediation Reference Group

The decision to strengthen the mediation capacity of SADC as part of its APSA component was taken by the Summit in 2004, but the creation of corresponding structures only returned to the agenda in 2008. By 2010, a drafting process that involved regional and UN experts produced a plan to create a mediation infrastructure consisting of a Panel of Elders (PoE), Mediation Reference Group (MRG) and Mediation Support Unit (MSU) (Hartman 2013, pp. 6–7). The members of the PoE, who must include civic leaders, were appointed in 2014, but nominations that needed states' approval continued in 2018. According to the planned architecture, the Elders would serve as stand-by panel for both preventive diplomacy and mediation, which would either lead or assist mediations in coordination with the Chair of the Organ and Executive Secretary of the SADC Secretariat. However, by 2020, there was no indication that the Panel had been deployed to engage in peace diplomacy, with the exception of one member, Joaquim Chissano, who continued his prior role as SADC mediator for Madagascar. Rather than deploying the Elders to Lesotho, SADC stuck to the old practice of mandating a sitting president, Cyril Ramaphosa, to lead the mediation. In Zimbabwe, SADC's crisis management efforts in response to the 2017 coup were led by the SADC Chair. Efforts by the erstwhile SADC facilitator, Thabo Mbeki, to facilitate dialogue in 2019, did not take place under an official SADC mandate. The failure to use the Elders for peace diplomacy indicates a reluctance by political decision-makers to abandon entrenched practices to institutionalise the mediation infrastructure that the Secretariat developed with the assistance of donors and technical experts. Whereas SADC-CNGO was not consulted on the establishment of the PoE, civil society stakeholders from conflict-affected SADC countries who contributed to our research were often unaware of its existence (Aeby 2021, p. 48).

The SADC mediation infrastructure comprises an MRG, whose ambiguous mandate includes advising the Elders and directly engaging in mediation. The nine

members of the MRG first met in 2015 after being nominated in 2012. The advisory group comprises ambassadors, former government officials, whose background in mediation is unclear, and two civil society representatives, including the director of ACCORD (SADC 2015). Apart from the deployment of the MRG Chair, Leonardo Simão, to act as Chissano's adviser in Madagascar, there was no indication that the MRG had been used to assist peace diplomacy by 2020. Whereas the MRG and MSU organised meetings, the Secretariat, apparently, did not require its assistance (Aeby 2021, p. 48).

Apart from being represented in the MRG, ACCORD signed an MOU with SADC in 2015 to assist conflict analysis and mediation training for civilians, police and military (SADC 2016). Whilst the SADC mediation infrastructure was generally underutilised, training was the area where the MRG are most likely to become active.

19.5.6 SADC Mediation Support Unit

The MRG launched with a staff of three in 2014 in the Organ Directorate after the design of the structure had commenced in 2008. During a pilot phase that ended in 2018, the MSU was financed through a Regional Political Cooperation Programme with support from the European Development Fund (SADC 2019). The operations and team of the MSU were downscaled after the programme expired in 2018 as SADC did not mobilise the resources that were required to maintain the structure, leading to a loss of expertise and momentum in the development of the mediation infrastructure. NGOs involvement in operationalising the structure was minimal but significant. The director of the Centre for Mediation in Africa, who had assisted the development of the SADC Organ Protocol and plan of action to strengthen the AU's mediation capacity, assisted the design of the mediation infrastructure with the financial support of GIZ. Whereas SADC-CNGO had advocated the mediation infrastructure, it was invited to a workshop and had informal exchanges with SADC officials and the planned structures (Aeby 2021, pp. 49–53).

The SU supported several diplomatic missions and assisted the SADC envoy to identify civic stakeholders in Madagascar, but NGOs were not involved in its operational support activities. Before its operations were downscaled, the MSU made remarkable strides in capacity-building, providing mediation and dialogue training over 450 intergovernmental, state and non-state actors. The training curriculum was developed and evaluated with the assistance of consultants and ACCORD. By 2020, there were no indications that the MSU engaged in systematic knowledge-management activities, which would constitute a primary area where the SADC Organ could meet the SIPO II objective of working with regional research (Aeby 2019, pp. 49–53).

19.5.7 Civil Society Inclusion in SADC Mediations

Before the SADC mediation infrastructure was introduced, SADC facilitated the negotiation of agreements and implementation processes in Lesotho, Madagascar and Zimbabwe, whereby the space for civil society inclusion varied markedly and heavily depended on the will of mediators and political actors.

The SADC facilitation and negotiating parties shut civil society out from the negotiation of Zimbabwe's 2008 Global Political Agreement, although the accord included a comprehensive reform plan that would require broad-based societal support to be implemented. The facilitation team accepted submissions by CSOs, which the facilitators considered identical to those of the political parties. The SADC team, moreover, held hearings with religious leaders and women's groups (Aeby 2016, p. 712). The implementation of transitional mechanisms, such as the constitutional reform, implementation monitoring mechanism, and organ for national healing remained under the control of political parties, whilst CSOs sought to impact the GPA process from the margins. The constitutional reform involved a consultative mechanism that was required to receive UNDP support, but as the parties hand-picked participants, many important CSOs boycotted the process. Most CSOs used the limited space and pragmatically engaged in flawed GPA mechanisms whilst undertaking independent activities to foster peacebuilding and a democratic transition (Aeby 2015, pp. 111–147; Aeby 2016, pp. 712–717). When the South African SADC Chair engaged in talks with political and military actors as the 2017 coup that ousted President Mugabe unfolded, there were no indications of consultations with civil society (Aeby 2021, pp. 51–53; Africa Confidential 2017).

Following the 2009 coup in Madagascar, SADC took the lead in the mediation, which had been initiated by the AU and UN, after the Summit mandated Chissano to facilitate dialogue and a transition. When the mediation was still under the AU's aegis, it was controversially decided that the negotiations should only include four political formations representing the coup leader and three former presidents. The UN envoy had pledged for an inclusive dialogue (ICG 2010, 25; Witt 2016, p. 147). The four parties negotiated the SADC-facilitated Maputo Accords and the Addis Ababa Additional Act of 2009, which failed to end the crisis. (Joint Mediation Team 2009) In the dialogue was subsequently expanded to negotiate the SADC Roadmap among 11 political groups (Joint Mediation Team 2011; Nathan 2013, p. 6). As Antonia Witt shows, the Chissano team regularly consulted civil society groups, but the impact of CSO consultations on the content of the roadmap that resembled previous accords was doubtful (Witt 2017, p. 214). Whilst the SADC-facilitated negotiations faltered, Malagasy churches and NGOs organised a parallel Malagacho-Malagache national dialogue, which SADC embraced in 2010. The SADC Roadmap eventually enabled the installation of a recognised transitional government and envisaged a civil society participation in monitoring and reconciliation mechanisms, which the churches rejected. Instead, the churches organised a dialogue conference in 2013, whose participants issued a statement calling for the replacement of the SADC Roadmap with an inclusive transition (Witt 2017, p. 218; FFKM 2020).

Between 1998 and 2014, SADC repeatedly intervened in Lesotho and facilitated political dialogues to contain post-electoral conflicts and the politicised armed forces. Dimpho Motsamai shows that SADC was initially reluctant to engage civil society but came to praise the Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL) for facilitating a dialogue between 2009 and 2011 that produced an agreement on electoral reform. When the SADC mediation resumed in 2014, interparty talks were facilitated by the CCL and presided by the Namibian SADC Chair (Motsamai 2018, 150–179). After SADC mandated the South African Deputy President to mediate dialogue, the CCL and Lesotho Council of NGOs remained highly involved and SADC-CNGO served intermediary between SADC and CSOs (Aeby 2021, p. 52; Shale/Gerenge 2016).

The three SADC mediations largely took place before the new mediation infrastructure was introduced. The MSU interacted local CSOs and assisted the identification stakeholders for consultations in follow-up missions to Madagascar. To see whether the introduction of the PoE, MRG, and MSU benefits the inclusion of civil society in SADC mediations, the SADC mediation infrastructure would need to be rendered fully operational (Aeby 2021, p. 52).

19.6 Comparative Insights

The discussion of the policy frameworks of the three organisations, involvement of NGOs in structures for prevention and peace-making, and inclusion of local CSOs enables the following comparative insights.

19.6.1 Policy Frameworks for Civil Society Participation

The policy frameworks of the three organisations set different conditions for civil society participation as they are underpinned by security that range from state-centric conflict management to holistic human security and inclusive peace in ECOWAS. The conditions also differ as, in the cases of the AU and ECOWAS, detailed guidelines on mediation practices complement strong provisions for civil society participation in statutory documents and strategic policy plans, whereas SADC is yet to elaborate such guidelines.

ECOWAS elaborate policy framework envisaged civil society participation across the board and sees NGOs as leading actors in conflict prevention and peace-making, intermediaries between ECOWAS, states and communities, and facilitators of multi-track dialogues (ECOWAS 2017, pp. 57, 89). The AU's framework encourages collaborations for conflict prevention and peace-making, including early warning and mediation support, but prioritises ECOSOCC over African NGOs with suitable expertise (SADC 2010, pp. 23 – 35). SADC's policies propose collaborations with research institutions but omit further details (SADC 2010, pp. 23 – 35). Whereas the policy frameworks give legitimacy to NGOs' involvement in APSA structures, they

include major grey areas. Closing these grey areas could either help guaranteeing spaces for participation or constrain otherwise informal interactions between NGOs and IGOs (Aeby 2021, p. 54).

In terms of civil society inclusion in peace processes, mediation guidelines of the AU and ECOWAS declare inclusivity a mediation principle, which mediators must balance against the practicability of negotiations. Rather than recommending civil society delegations be included at the negotiation table, the guidelines portray local CSOs as actors that must be consulted or included in dialogues on subordinate tracks (AU 2012, p. 9, 2014a, 73; ECOWAS 2017, 2018). Consultations, however, risk becoming a window-dressing exercise if they have no meaningful impact on the mediation agenda and content of agreements. Since the mediation guidelines for inclusion are recommendations rather than rules, their application not only depends on the will of the dominant conflict parties, but on the mediators and decision-making organs that define mediation mandates.

19.6.2 Participation in Organisational Structures

The access points the three organisations provided for CSOs to inform policymaking in the domain of peace and security vary sharply. The interfaces the organisations use to liaise with civil society illustrate the benefits and limitations of the respective models. The ECOSOCC had still not become the primary interface for CSOs to participate two decades after it was introduced by the AU's Constitutive Act. ECOSOCC shows that an interface prevents rather than enables meaningful participation if state actors define restrictive rules for CSOs to engage the organisation. It excluded vast sections of African civil society, deprived the AU of vital inputs from citizens, and risked undermining its credibility vis-à-vis civil society. ECOWAS and SADC, meanwhile, show that an interface model that depends on an independent civil society network is vulnerable to organisational challenges and funding constraints of NGOs. However, the model that builds on an independent civil society platform, which is owned and managed by its stakeholders, is better suited to provide an accessible and credible channel for CSOs to represent their interests vis-à-vis the IGO. Alternative funding models may prove instrumental in developing an interface that balances the independence and sustainability of the platform (Aeby 2021, p. 19).

The institutionalisation of channels for CSOs to inform decision-making bodies for peace and security differs between the AU PSC, which invited relevant organisations to address the Council, the ECOWAS MSC, whose members received quarterly briefings from WANEP, and the SADC Summit and Organ Troika, which consist of heads of state and had no formal consultative mechanism. Whereas only a few selected CSOs could present statements to the PSC and ECOWAS ambassadors, these platforms were an important channel to give visibility to the concerns of the invited NGOs and their constituents, including local civil society actors from conflict-affected countries. Informal channels to inform political decision-making in

the organisations were equally important. For this purpose, NGOs conducted custom-made analysis and lobbied representatives, embassies and foreign affairs departments of influential member states as well as ruling parties and their civic allies. To stand a chance to make an impact, the NGOs had to foresee the agenda of decision-making organs, identify relevant states, and customise their inputs for recipients (Aeby 2021, p. 20).

The involvement of NGOs in early warning systems and the latter's suitability for such partnerships varied dramatically between the organisations. Whereas WANEP was an integral part of ECOWARN and tapped WARN into the system to enrich the data with reports by civil society monitors, the CEWS partnered with expert NGOs from across the continent. SADC's state intelligence-focused REWC would need to be replaced with a system that focused on human security and served to inform prevention and mediation. Southern African NGOs had great potential to establish an independent early warning system and share analytical outputs with stakeholders in states and the APSA (Aeby 2021, p. 56).

The panels for preventive diplomacy and mediation of the AU and ECOWAS, which include eminent civic leaders, collaborated with NGOs to compile reports, organise high-level dialogues, and to build bureaucratic capacity (Aeby 2021, 57; de Carvalho 2017, 8). Stakeholder consultations by the panels provided for an important channel for local CSOs to inform prevention, mediation and reports to decision-making organs (Gomes Porto/Ngandu 2014, p. 188; Nathan et al. 2015, p. 52). However, the AU PoW was underutilised, the ECOWAS CoW defunct and the SADC PoE yet to become fully operationalised in 2020. FemWise Africa, on the other hand, not only served to bring women to the forefront of peace diplomacy but aimed at promoting multitrack mediations and establishing links to local communities from where FemWise mediators were recruited (Aeby 2021, p. 56).

The mediation support structures of the three organisations were designed and operationalised with the support of consultants from expert NGOs. The NGOs helped to secure the buy-in of political decision-makers and donors, facilitated knowledge-transfer, drafted guidelines, critically reviewed drafts, and adjusted them to the regional context. Challenges related to a lack of African leadership as few NGOs had the relevant expertise; the entrepreneurial imperatives of NGOs; the adaptation of guidelines to regional realities; the compatibility of normative preferences which the NGOs transported into instruments; and an apparent lack of buy-in by political stakeholders for structures whose development was promoted by NGOs and donors (Aeby 2021, p. 56).

The politically sensitive backstopping of mediation missions left virtually no room for NGOs to be involved except for the use of analytical inputs from think tanks. Whereas the MSS interacted with local CSOs during missions, the most immediate contribution they could make to promote civil society inclusion was to propose inclusive peace process designs and streamline stakeholder consultations to ensure inputs made it on the mediation agenda. Civil society actors were involved in the capacity-building activities of the MSS as experts, trainers and trainees. Whilst African NGOs could assist the rollout of training on a broad scale, the involvement of multiple NGOs, who were keen to offer their services with the support of donors, sometimes

led to a duplication of efforts. The development of knowledge management systems to retain and produce comparative mediation knowledge required great resources and, thus, saw little progress. African research institutions that already make up for the lack internal institutional memory in the APSA would be well-placed to become part of a hybrid system, in which mediation support officers debrief mediators and external researchers carry out tedious comparative analyses to inform future mediations. Since a standing team of experts as in the UN is too expensive, thematic experts from NGOs could be put on standby to assist mediators to design peace processes and draft agreement provisions (Aeby 2021, pp. 57–60).

19.6.3 Inclusion in Mediations

Local civil society actors could use several channels to engage mediation teams and inform the mediation agenda in peace processes, but the availability and viability of these channels varied between the three organisations and peace processes.

The channels, firstly, included stakeholder consultations by lead mediators, which were common in peace processes that were mediated in all cases, but depended on the specific political context as illustrated by the three SADC mediations. Secondly, owing to their long-term presence, local expertise and key role in supporting mediators, liaison offices, where available, provided an effective channel for local CSOs to inform mediations. Thirdly, FemWise mediators, who included local peacebuilders, could, in principle, serve as channel for communities to engage mediation teams. Fourthly, regional NGO networks with formalised ties to the organisations could act as intermediaries and assist local CSOs to access mediation teams. WANEP, in particular, could help ECOWAS mediation teams to identify civil society stakeholders for consultations and facilitated dialogues on subordinate tracks (Aeby 2021, p. 57).

The availability and viability of these channels to inform mediations varied owing to the way inputs from stakeholder consultations were processed and included in the mediation agenda. Unless consultations make an actual impact on negotiation processes and the content of agreements, consultative mechanisms amount to window-dressing. The holding of consultations could be rendered more systematic, frequent and consistent. Consultations and their relevance heavily depended on the volition of mediators and conflict parties as guidelines for inclusive mediation are not mandatory. Where sitting presidents lead mediations, civil society inclusion tended to be more difficult. The structures and mediators of the organisations preferred to work with trusted partner NGOs, who had an inadvertent gatekeeping role for local CSOs, who sought to engage mediation teams. Local CSOs oftentimes lacked the necessary resources, expertise, communication style and understanding of the IGOs' functioning to inform mediations, as civil society tends to be weak in war-torn and authoritarian states that curtail civic freedoms. Where the government deemed the presence of liaison offices, mediation missions and consultations an infringement of its sovereignty, an engagement with local CSOs was impractical (Aeby 2021, p. 57).

19.7 Conclusion

In sum, the three organisations that constitute key components of the APSA provide a range of channels for CSOs to inform conflict prevention and peace-making, whose viability depends on the respective IGO and peace process. The APSA has seen the proliferation of policy guidelines for civil society inclusion, which were drafted by technical experts and consultants from NGOs, who diffused the inclusive peace paradigm. But political decision-makers and high-level mediators are yet to fully embrace these norms to put them into practice. The civil society interfaces and key access points for CSOs, such as panels for preventive diplomacy and mediation, either needed reform or were underutilised. Inclusive peace process designs that were proposed in guidelines were yet to be standardised in practice. To prevent consultations with local CSOs from amounting to window-dressing, mediation teams needed to ensure that civic stakeholders' inputs were meaningfully included in mediation agendas and agreements. Civil society actors, who seek to participate in APSA structures and mediations, must, thus, constantly navigate the available channels anew to tell apart pathways and dead ends (Aeby 2021, 54–59).

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