

# Mano River Basin: An Evaluation of Negotiation and Mediation Techniques

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**Abstract.** *This paper interrogates the negotiation and mediation techniques that was used following aggression, violence and social disruptions in Mano River basin, particularly against the recent return to democracy in the region. While peace has largely been restored, the scattered but continuing incidence of aggression, violence and social disruptions in the Basin has raised questions about the viability of negotiation and mediation techniques. The success or failure of these techniques has effect on the sustainability of State, individual and social structures in the region. Therefore, the paper argues that enough attention has not been paid to the ethical, moral and historical dimensions of the problem of negotiation and mediation, especially the role of traditional institutions and civil society agencies as critical components in conflict resolution. Given this, the paper draws attention to some of the gaps and challenges embedded in 'imported' negotiation and mediation techniques that leverage the certification of conflicts in Africa as being "ethnic and racial". Using secondary data and drawing on personal experiences in the Mano River Basin (MRB) countries in West Africa, the paper also raises critical questions about the relationship between negotiation and mediation techniques and conflict resolution and the lessons learned so far. It also suggests ways of addressing those aspects of negotiation and mediation techniques deficits as a basis for suggesting options that will likely reduce recourse to conflicts, encourage dialogue and inclusive participation, as well as increase the chances for peace in the region and Africa.*

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## **Introduction**

The Mano River Basic (MRB) Region, which is made of four West African countries - Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire - is renowned for its porous borders which allows the flow of weapons, the movement of former combatants and the trans-national exploitation of resources (Afolabi, 2017). The violence arising from the inflow of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) into the region has led to violence, conflicts and social disruptions for more than two decades. At a point, UNDP (2006) noted that the proliferation of (SALWs) in the Mano River Region made it one of the most unstable areas on the planet. Therefore, the high incidence of violence and conflicts in the Mano River of West Africa raised a lot of concern and questions about the viability of life, peace, social structure and the state in the four countries. It has also raised issues and questions about the effectiveness of negotiation and mediation. However, it should be noted that, while through negotiation and mediation these conflicts and violent incidences have reduced drastically, the continued possession and proliferation of (SALWs) and the continued intermittent pockets of conflicts in the region are security threats (Garuba, 2013; Isiche, 2002).

In a related manner, the introduction of electoral democracy with its fierce competition for power, following the decades of armed conflict and political strife, including civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, have provided the context to resort to violence to settle electoral disputes, calling into question the viability of negotiation and mediation as a lasting tool for conflict prevention and peacebuilding mechanism. Furthermore, the non-resolution of the issues of porous borders, former fighters and refugees among the four countries are problems that can put a lie to negotiation and mediation efforts. On the other hand, other issues that are potential security threats in the Mano River Region that can result in conflicts and violence include narcotics trafficking, illegal mining, human trafficking, intra and inter communal feuds, local wars, rebel activities and terrorism (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Liberia [NSSL], 2008). As earlier noted, while negotiation and mediation mechanisms have reduced the occurrence of conflicts in the Mano River Region, especially in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire, the intermittent occurrence of these conflicts have raised ethical, moral and historical dimensions of the problem of negotiation and mediation in Africa. This is against the often-neglected role of traditional institutions and civil society agencies as critical components in negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution in Africa. Thus, given the above explanations, there is need for research to examine the theory and practice of negotiation and mediation within the context of violence and conflicts as a way of addressing those aspects of negotiation and mediation technique deficits as a basis for suggesting options that will likely reduce recourse to conflicts, encourage dialogue and inclusive participation, as well as increase the chances for peace in the region and Africa.

To tackle the identified lacuna, the study is structured as follows: the first section is the introduction which explains the issues and problematic of negotiation and mediation, the focus of why the research is undertaken, while the second section unpacks the concepts of negotiation and mediation. Section three examines the histography of Mano River Basin so as to give the political geography and history of the region. This dovetails into the section four which specifically situate peace, negotiation and mediation within the Mano River region. The section focussed on diverse actors' negotiation and mediation techniques to achieve peace. Section five analysed the problems of negotiation and mediation, including the limitations and lessons learned. This is central to understanding the limits of the effectiveness of negotiation and mediation. Following from this, section six looked at re-designing negotiation and mediation, going forward by exploring possibilities that can be adopted and used in intractable and intermittent incidences of violence and conflicts like has been witnessed in MRB region. The paper, in section seven, thereafter concluded with an interrogation of the extent of the chances for peace in MRB using orthodox negotiation and mediation techniques.

### **Conceptualising Negotiation and Mediation**

The concept of negotiation has received attention from different scholars. Negotiation connotes a peaceful method/technique through which conflicting parties or disputants resolve their differences. For Kissinger (1969), negotiation has to do with the process of bringing conflicting parties together to take a common position unanimously. Elsewhere, Fells (2012) defines negotiation as "a process where two parties with differences which they need to resolve are trying to reach agreement through exploring for options and exchanging offers-and an agreement" (p. 3). For him, negotiation is a process (involving sequence of activities). It involves two or more parties, with clear differences to be addressed for a negotiation to take place. Negotiation aims to make the conflicting parties arrive at a compromise, usually with a win-win situation for all parties involved. Negotiation agreements are usually reached in a "non-judicial or non-arbitral setting" (Jack, 2014: 42). Given these varied notions of negotiation, Alfredson and Cungu (2008) are of the opinion that scholars, however, agree on one basic tenet of negotiation. This tenet is the assumption that parties who negotiate agree in at least one fundamental respect; that is, "they share a belief that their respective purpose will be better served by entering into negotiation with the other party" (Alfredson & Cungu, 2008: 6).

However, mediation differs from negotiation because it often involves a third party believed to be neutral. It is the process of coming to terms or compromise by conflicting parties and this is achieved by the help of a third neutral party- the mediator. In a mediation, the mediator creates the appropriate environment which makes it possible for the conflicting parties to enter into dialogue (Sandu, 2013b). The mediator, sometimes called the third party, is usually required in mediatory efforts because of the mistrust between/

among conflicting parties (Chereji & Pop, 2014; Govender & Ngandu, 2010). Mediation has, thus, been referred to as “a process of dialogue and negotiation in which a third party assists two or more disputant parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict without resort to force” (Nathan, 2009: 2). For Herrberg, Gunduz and Davis (2009), mediation describes the involvement of both inter- and intra-state actors, such as the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), in conflict resolution among disputant parties. Furthermore, they assert that what differentiates mediation from other forms of third-party interventions in the peace process is that mediation does not involve the use of force and disputant parties have a say in the outcome of the peace-making process (Herrberg, *et al.*, 2009). Mediation is, therefore, a relevant tool in conflict prevention, stultifying violence eruption, management of ongoing conflict, conflict resolution and peace building efforts in post-conflict environment.

The quality of mediation in a conflict goes a long way in determining the success or otherwise of any mediation (Sandu, 2013a). This may have informed the submission of Govender and Ngandu (2010) that “*ceteris paribus*, depending on their proficiency, experience and team, mediators can either heighten or reduce the likelihood of achieving a positive outcome” (p. 14). Also, Marsh (as cited in Smith, 1998: 3) identified five elements of a successful mediation that include: an impartial third party; the protection of the integrity of proceedings; good faith from disputant parties; attendance of proceedings by those with full authority to make decisions; and an appropriate neutral location.

According to Nathan (2009: 25-26), mediation involves the following activities:

- Analysing the conflict, diagnosing its causes and identifying the parties’ positions and interests.
- Pursuing shuttle diplomacy when the adversaries refuse to talk directly to each other.
- Employing methods to build the parties’ confidence in negotiations.
- Designing and convening mediation processes and preparing agendas in consultation with the parties.
- Facilitating dialogue, negotiations and cooperative problem solving by the parties.
- Identifying common ground between the parties and generating options for overcoming deadlocks.
- Helping the parties to forge agreements.
- Creating opportunities for civil society to contribute to peace talks.
- Co-ordinating external actors’ that have an interest in the conflict but are not participants in the negotiations (e.g. International bodies, donors and neighbouring states).
- Providing information about the peace process to relevant actors, the public at large and communities in conflict in the country.

## **Historiography of Mano River Basin**

The Mano River Region, as earlier mentioned, is made of four West-African countries-Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire. It is renowned for its decades of violence and conflicts facilitated by porous borders, flow of weapons, cross-border movement of former combatants, and the transnational exploitation of resources (Afolabi, 2017). The shared open borders, the struggle for power, electoral democracy and unresolved long standing inter- and intra-state disputes have made the region highly volatile and unstable. The large inflow of Small Arms and Light Weapons in this region, coupled with several democratic setbacks, has made the Mano River Basin one of the most unstable areas on the planet (Small Arms Survey, 2004; UNDP, 2006). The high and continuing incidence of violence and conflicts, though now on a smaller scale and occurring intermittently, has raised a lot of concern and questions about the viability of life, peace, social structure and the state in these countries. Furthermore, and critically for these study, it raised questions on the viability of negotiation and mediation as peace-building technique to achieve lasting peace in the region and in countries where decades of fighting, violence and conflicts has become endemic and perennial with global security threat implications (Garuba, 2013).

Mano River Basin have witnessed a long period of armed conflict and political strife, including civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, several unrests in Cote d'Ivoire and have caused huge damage to human security. The high level of migration, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in the MRB are pointers to the interplay of negotiation and mediation techniques failure (Afolabi, 2017). Lack of effective supervision and management of internally displaced persons and refugees has had a multiplier effect on violence and conflicts in the region which is further exacerbated by zero-sum game, winner takes all nature of electoral politics in the region and Africa. The level of violence and conflicts in Mano River Basin, while it has dropped significantly, has remained intermittent and posed questions about the effectiveness and viability of negotiation and mediation techniques in a region where might is right and violence is the perceived acceptable medium of dispute resolution with country and regional implications (Afolabi, 2017).

## **Peace, Negotiation and Mediation Techniques in Mano River Basin**

The cessation of hostilities in the Mano River Basin was achieved through many agencies, particularly using varieties of negotiation and mediation techniques to achieve peace in the region. To achieve this peace, various actors, ranging from governments, regional, international, religious and traditional, to civil society, adopted varying peace negotiations and mediation techniques. In order to understand how peace was achieved in the Mano River region, there is the need to discuss in this section, the actors involved in the negotiation and mediation as well as the techniques used.

### **1. Techniques Adopted by Governments/Governmental Actors**

Various governments of the Mano River countries adopted many techniques for negotiation towards peacebuilding in their respective countries towards ensuring peaceful co-existence in the region. For instance, to strengthen peace and security in Sierra Leone, the government embarked on security sector reform aimed at strengthening civil decision-making bodies. This technique, according to Bearne, Oliker, O'Brien and Rathmell (2005), helped to constrain the power of armed forces and assisted peace talks and peacebuilding in Sierra Leone. In Liberia, the government had embarked on the 'Poverty Reduction Strategy' (PRS), as a technique for effective negotiation and peacebuilding. This was to ensure a more inclusive society and to appease those who had felt marginalized in the country (Petra, 2014). Inclusive of this technique, Kurz (2010) posits, was the preposition by the Liberian government to create a 'Reparations Trust Fund' in order to compensate victims of civil wars in the country. By doing so, negotiation and mediation talks were made easier and largely receptive. Also adopted and implemented by the Liberian government was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Liberia. This Commission investigated cases of human rights abuses during the civil wars and set the tone for reconciliation. To achieve this, the TRC adopted the collection of testimonies/narratives of past abuses from private individuals. Petra (2014) avers that the TRC since inception in 2010 had collected an estimate of 16,800 testimonies/statements in Liberia, which had helped in peace negotiations and mediation in the country.

The technique adopted by the Guinean government in negotiation and mediation has been mostly via the use of basic guiding principles in mediation and conflict resolution. Such principles include: "impartiality of the mediator, profound knowledge of the conflict context, capacity to listen, and capacity to find compromise" (Petra, 2014: 33). For Cote d'Ivoire, the Commission on Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation (CDVR) was created to enhance negotiation and mediation, promote reconciliation and prevent future crisis in the country. The techniques often adopted by the CDVR included the analysis of the social problems and challenges confronting the people as well as the conduct of public survey to analyse the triggers of wars and its impacts on the people (CDVR, 2013). This helped to bring both victims and perpetrators to talk to each other, thus, sowing the seed of forgiveness among the citizens. The CDVR also adopted the reparation technique which consists of material, moral and psychological support to victims of war and reintegrate perpetrators into the society (Petra, 2014; CDVR, 2013).

### **2. Techniques Adopted by Regional Actors**

Regional bodies, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU) and the Mano River Union (MRU), among others, have also adopted various techniques in peace negotiations and mediation in the Mano River Basin.

For ECOWAS, peacebuilding among member states within the Mano River was mostly achieved via three different techniques, *viz*: Political Declarations; the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security; and the use of 'hard security' (ECOWAS, 2015; Petra, 2014; Jack, 2014). ECOWAS political declarations consists of the protocol of non-aggression adopted in 1978 and the protocol on democracy and good governance which lays out conditions and the need for a free, fair and transparent elections as a means of preventing and resolving conflicts. Also, the protocol on the mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution, peacekeeping and security adopts guidelines for peace consolidation, security and stability among its members in the Mano River region (Jack, 2014).

ECOWAS also adopts economic and trade techniques towards peace negotiation and mediation among members in the Mano Basin (ECOWAS, 2015; Jack, 2014). The ECOWAS 'hard security' technique adopts military and civilian interventions in contributing to peacebuilding among Mano River member states. This usually involves the use of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) (Agbambu, 2010). The ESF consists the Main Force and the Task Force. While the Main Force comprises 2,772 personnel, the Task Force comprises about 1,000 troops and both could be deployed to achieving peace through negotiation and mediation (Agbambu, 2010). Conteh, Taffinski and Hislaire (2014) aver that the ECOWAS has deployed these various techniques over crises in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea over the years.

The Mano River Union (MRU) has also adopted techniques and initiatives to establish and enhance the structures and tools for conflict resolution, including enhancing border security. Furthermore, the AU has adopted series of techniques for conflict negotiation, prevention, resolution and management in Africa, generally, and in the Mano River region, specifically. Petra (2014) posits that the AU's primary techniques and means for mediation and conflict resolution in the River Basin is the African Standby Force (ASF), the Panel of the Wise (POW) and the AU Peace Fund. While the ASF provides civilian and military components, the Peace Fund provides financial assistance and the Panel of the Wise is made up of five 'highly respected individuals' who assist towards peace negotiation and mediation within the Mano River Basin and the continent at large. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) also uses workshops as a technique for peace, negotiation and mediation. The body organizes conflicts resolution and peacebuilding workshops throughout the West African region, of which the MRB is part (Sues & Mathias, 2013; Conteh, *et al.*, 2014).

### **3. Techniques Adopted by International Actors**

International actors, such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), have also adopted varieties of peace negotiation and mediation techniques. For instance, arguably, the most prominent technique adopted by the UN are the UN Peacekeeping

Missions which aims at monitoring ceasefire agreements and negotiations (Petra, 2014). Such peace negotiation and mediation efforts include the UN Mission in Liberia from 2003 to 2018 (Amanda & Liezelle, 2018) and UN Mission in Sierra Leone (Obi, 2009; Conteh, *et al.*, 2014). The UN Mediation Support Unit (MSU) of the Department for Political Affairs (DPA) is also a tool with which the UN provides advice, finance and logistics to peace processes. The UN Mediation Support Structure also consist of UN Standby Team of Mediation experts, which helps to promote capacity building in terms of mediation of regional and sub-regional organizations (Petra, 2014). The Peace and Development Advisors (PDA) also work with the MSU in conflict mediation and negotiations. The UN also uses the envoys of the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) to provide support and advice in peace negotiation and mediation, and also to monitor peacebuilding activities. The UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone to Consolidated Peace (UNIPSIL) was also part of UN's peace negotiation and mediation technique employed in solving the Sierra Leonean crisis (Amanda & Liezelle, 2018).

#### ***4. Techniques Adopted by Religious and Traditional Actors***

Religious and traditional actors have also adopted various peace negotiation and mediation techniques towards peacebuilding in the Mano River Basin. The positive influence of religious and traditional actors on negotiation and mediation is based on the fact that "one of the assets that religious leaders can use in conflict resolution is their established regional and global networks, from which they can attain support" (Petra, 2014, p. 38). This support can be expressed in places of worship like the churches, mosques, temples, community centres and educational institutions. This makes it possible for such actors to reach a large number of people through the networks of their religious and educational centres who otherwise might be unreachable, while capitalizing on their status as leaders (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). The techniques that have been adopted over time by traditional actors towards peacebuilding and mediation in the Mano River are basically the 'Palaver hut', the 'kinship of pleasantry', town-hall initiatives and cultural fraternity (Sites of Liberia, 2009). These are traditional community methods for conflict resolution and for *palaver hut*, it functions through the gathering of citizens under a 'palaver' tree or in a palaver hut to discuss community issues and resolve conflicts (Petra, 2014; Sites of Liberia, 2009).

In Liberia, for instance, Kurz (2010) posits that the 'palaver hut' and the 'kinship of pleasantry' served as a forum where the perpetrators, victims and survivors could meet and confess. While perpetrators confess their war crimes, the survivors forgave such perpetrators or made them go through community punishment (Kurz, 2010). The 'kinship of pleasantry', Naine (2005) explains, is a form of friendship established across cultural ties on the basis of humour and mockery. This, he posits, contributes to the dissolution of negative tensions and prevent conflict.



Religious actors, on the other hand, have also adopted several techniques towards peace negotiation and mediation in the Mano River Basin. They achieved this by mobilizing religious narratives and doctrines to motivate disputant parties to shelve their swords (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). This is usually achieved via the doctrines of forgiveness, love and compassion which have been used over time for the purpose of reconciliation. During the Civil War in Sierra Leone, for instance, the Inter Religious Council undertook dialogue with all disputant parties and contributed significantly to the reconciliation efforts. Also, in Liberia, the Inter Religious Council played a significant role in peace negotiations and drafted the Liberian Peace Accord which was signed by all parties and was instrumental to peacebuilding in Liberia. Furthermore, between 2002-2003, the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) implemented a programme it tagged 'Peacebuilding, Reconstruction and Reconciliation in the Mano River Basin', which assisted in peace-making and mediation activities (Sues & Mathias, 2003; Conteh, *et al.*, 2014).

### **5. Techniques Adopted by Civil Society Actors**

Civil Society actors have also adopted various peace negotiation and mediation techniques in the Mano River Basin. Petra (2014) observed that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) often employ multi-track mediation when carrying out peacebuilding negotiations and mediation. The multi-track mediation involves shuttle diplomacy and advocacy between the parties through constant outreach to disputants. For instance, shuttle diplomacy was applied by women's groups in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean Civil Wars to reach actors in the conflict. Such CSOs include the Mano River Women's Peace Network (Sues & Mathias, 2003); the Liberian Women's Initiative; Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace and the Campaign for Good Governance (Petra, 2014). In the Sierra Leonean Civil Wars, women's groups were the first to engage in the dialogue process with the RUF in place.

In Liberia, during the first phase of the Civil War, a lot of CSOs sprang up to engage in negotiation and mediation. Such CSOs were the Liberia Women Initiative (LWI) and the Centre for Law and Human Rights Education (CLHRE). Also, in Sierra Leone, in 1995, several CSOs came together to mount pressure on both the government and the RUF to come to the negotiation tables. In Guinea, neutral CSOs engaged in shuttle diplomacy, often neglected by the government. They had also engaged in human capital development and strived to improve accountability on the part of government. Petra (2014) and Conteh *et al.* (2014) observed that the mediation activities of CSOs in Guinea contributed to peace negotiations and prevented the outbreak of conflicts. Furthermore, in Cote d'Ivoire, CSOs often played an important role in mediating in community-based conflicts in situations and circumstances where other approaches to peacebuilding negotiation and mediation had failed. As well, the Mano River Union Civil Society Movement

(MRUCSM) also put in place various conferences in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia (Sues & Mathias, 2003; Conteh *et al.*, 2014) as a mediatory tool. We now examine the problems and challenges of negotiation and mediation.

### **Problems of Negotiation and Mediation: Examining Limitations and Lessons Learned**

There is no gainsaying the fact that the various peace negotiation and mediation techniques that have been put in place by various actors have been, undeniably, useful in the quest for finding sustained peace in the Mano River Basin. Nevertheless, these negotiations and mediation have been associated with problems/challenges and they have their limitations too. Therefore, for this section of the paper, we examined these problems and challenges, *vis-à-vis* the lessons that could be learned going-forward.

One major problem with negotiation and mediation in the Mano River Basin was the mistrust that existed both among warring factions and the international and regional actors (Conteh *et al.*, 2014). The ECOWAS and indeed other regional and international actors who got involved in negotiation and mediation, failed to put strategies in place to build confidence among warring factions. Rather, they were mostly interested in getting the warring factions to sign 'peace' agreements, mostly signed in deception. Describing the Liberian situation in this respect, Captan (as cited in Conteh *et al.*, 2014) posits that people "who didn't trust each other were making commitment to each other to work together, knowing very well that confidence doesn't exist between them" (p. 55). Captan also added that the mistrust among ECOWAS members and other actors interested in peacebuilding resulted in communication gaps among warring factions. This was to the extent that when there is an agreement for ceasefire, implementation deficit always results because of information not reaching those at the lower level of leadership within the warring factions. Closely related to this is the challenge of the ECOWAS technique of 'hard security', in which the successful implementation of the technique depends on the willingness of members to implement diplomatic protocols/trade measures and contribute personnel for military and civilian forces (Agbambu, 2010). This challenge has always been a recurring limitation factor in peace negotiation and mediation. Added to this is the fact that warring factions sometimes set unreasonable preconditions for negotiation. This is also a major challenge (Armon & Carl, 1996).

Closely linked with the issues of trust and confidence as negotiation and mediation limitation is the problem of lack of coordination and coherence especially among local civil societies. As argued by Manson (2013), negotiation/mediation process is more likely to succeed where there are no divisions among local civil societies. Noticeably, there seem to be an influx of several local civil societies in the Mano River region, most of which are not in coherence with each other. Ettang, Maina and Razia (2011) posit that the emergence of several CSOs in the region, with lack of coordination and

coherence, has resulted in varieties and duplicity of peacebuilding and negotiation efforts in the MRB. According to them, even though the creation of bodies such as West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) were geared towards bringing local civil societies together, the situation has largely not changed. Furthermore, CSOs are often accused of compromise, usually by aligning with political parties and disputants. They also suffer from lack of funding which prevents them from being effective (Petra, 2014). For instance, in the 1990s, CSOs in Cote d'Ivoire were considered to have aligned with political parties, hence, did not enjoy the trust of the people. Given this, during the Civil War, activities of CSOs in Cote d'Ivoire were often met with violence. Similar situation played out in Liberia where President Charles Taylor sowed discord among civil society groups, which rendered the groups factionalised; a situation which impeded peace negotiation and mediation during the period.

Finance, or better put, lack of fund, is also a major limitation to negotiation and mediation efforts. The lack of independent finance by actors involved in negotiation and mediation often force them to seek financial partners, who use the 'carrot and stick' approach to drive their agenda (Conteh et al., 2014). Therefore, rather than put genuine efforts into negotiations and mediation, actors become tools in the hands of financial partners to achieve selfish interests, at the detriment of genuine peace negotiation. Furthermore, a lack of formal and established clear-cut structure for negotiation and mediation is also a major challenge in the Mano River Basin. As noticed from the various negotiations and mediation efforts/techniques adopted in the region, there is no gainsaying the fact that most of the peace negotiation and mediation moves were hurriedly 'packaged'. Therefore, the hurried and ad-hoc nature of negotiation and mediation ensures that there are no structures to guide negotiations and mediation, resulting in haphazard approach.

Furthermore, the disregard for traditional agencies/actors in the negotiations and mediation processes in the MRB is also a key limitation (Ettang et al., 2011). When negotiations are entered with total disregard or little regard for indigenous structures, institutions and agencies, with preference for 'imported' structures and institutions, such peacebuilding negotiation and mediation suffers setbacks particularly in terms of receptivity. Hence, mediators who embark on peacebuilding process with disregard for local actors, agencies and institutions, do that at their own peril. To remove this limitation, peacebuilding efforts/negotiations should be done in collaboration with local actors and agencies that are domiciled within local communities of warring factions.

Beaming the light on Liberia, Willie (as cited in Conteh et al., 2014) identified differing interpretations given to conflicts by warring factions as yet another problem with negotiation and mediation. While a warring faction might see conflict as a fight for rights, other parties to the conflict might see it as ethnic or territorial expansion. Therefore,

different and peculiar interpretations given to conflicts by warring factions has made it quite difficult for factions to come to agreement during negotiations and mediation efforts. This also explains the difficulty experienced with warring factions' adherence and commitment to signed peace agreements in all the conflicts that have taken place in MRB countries (Conteh et al., 2014). This for example, was responsible for splinter groups and multiple factions in Liberia.

Furthermore, the selfish and greedy interests of leaders and mediators who had difficulty in remaining neutral in negotiations and mediation processes is a major problem/limitation in peace negotiations and mediation efforts in the MRB. Hence, Svensson (2007) argues that a large portion of mediation efforts are done through biased mediators. Jack (2014) gives the example of the Kenyan Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, who was appointed as a mediator to negotiate an end to the conflict which ensued in Cote d'Ivoire as a result of the 2011 electoral disputes between Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Quattara. Raila Odinga, as a mediator in that conflict, compromised his neutrality and favoured an armed intervention which truncated the totality of the negotiation and mediation efforts. Also, for example, with respect to Liberia, representatives and interim leaders during the Liberian Civil Wars compromised and sought selfish interests during negotiations (Captan, as cited in Conteh et al., 2014). These leaders compromised and refused to be neutral, owing to personal interests. This impeded negotiation and mediation for a long time during the Liberian crisis.

Most importantly, negotiating and mediating for peace without efforts to address the triggers of the conflict, is often an exercise in futility. We consider this most important, that before, during and post-negotiations, genuine efforts must be put in place to address the root cause (s) of conflicts. This way, negotiations are not only successful and conflicts are resolved (albeit, not certainly), it also guarantees that future conflicts are averted. As Amanda & Liezelle (2018) have argued, the failure to address root causes of conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone dealt a blow to peace negotiation efforts. The same could be argued for the other Mano River countries of Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire. Thus, Amanda and Liezelle (2018) enumerate those areas which must be addressed for a successful peacebuilding negotiation and mediation: access to justice; security sector reform; reconciliation; inclusive economic diversification, reduction of donor dependency; governance; and cross-cutting issues (such as human rights, youth employment and education, etc.).

### **Designing Negotiation and Mediation: Exploring Possibilities**

Having appraised the challenges, problems and limitations with negotiations and mediation in the Mano River Basin, it is pertinent to provide a template and possibilities of achieving successful negotiations and mediation in future. It is important to mention that the role of the mediator is very critical to peace negotiation and mediation process.

As such, impartial, neutral and uncompromising mediators (Govender & Ngandu, 2010), whether international, regional, local or CSOs, must be employed in negotiation and mediation process. A successful mediation must be unbiased and protect the interest of all parties in order to bridge the gap in relationships among warring factions. Along with this is the need for a wide range of experience in mediation because “an experienced mediator is much more likely to be successful than an inexperienced mediator; and a confidence-building approach to mediation is more likely to yield a positive outcome than coercive diplomacy” (Nathan, 2009, p. 1). Therefore, in order to improve mediation process in the MRB, the need for experienced, unbiased and uncompromising mediators (local, regional, international, religious, CSOs, etc.) cannot be overemphasized.

To engage in effective negotiation and mediation, it is also pertinent to get the timing correctly. Getting the appropriate time or period when warring factions will be responsible and receptive of the negotiation and mediation process, is germane to achieving peace. This is what Zartman (1989), Smith & Smock (2008) and Zartman & Berman (1982) referred to as the ‘ripeness of the conflict resolution’. This is the stage in the conflict where warring factions become obviously tired and find themselves in a stalemate/deadlock. For Zartman (1989), this is the right time to negotiate. Accordingly, Zartman (2001) posits that “when the parties find themselves locked in a conflict from which they cannot escalate to victory and this deadlock is painful to both of them (although not necessarily in equal degree or for the same reasons), they seek an alternative policy” (p. 8). At this point, warring factions are most likely to embrace peace negotiation and mediation efforts. Alvaro (as cited in Isoaho & Tuuli, 2013) describes the essence of ‘ripeness’ in mediation process that, at that point, “the opposing parties perceive that the cost of coming to an agreement has become less than the cost of pursuing the conflict” (p. 24) When conflict has not reach its ripeness, Isoaho & Tuuli (2013) argue that mediation process-though not certainly, runs the risk of breaking down. The Sierra Leonean civil war and the failed Abidjan Peace Accord provides vivid examples. However, when the conflict became ripe for resolution, the Lomé Peace Accord of 1999 eventually put an end to the conflict (Isoaho & Tuuli, 2013). These scenarios explain the need to get the ‘right time’ when negotiation and mediation attempts is likely to be successful.

Confidence building among/between warring factions and the mediation process is vital to an effective peace negotiation and mediation. As such, a mediator must, as a matter of necessity, try to build parties’ confidence/trust on him/her and the mediation process. When warring factions lack confidence and trust for the mediator and the mediation process, they are unlikely to participate in such negotiations/mediation. Even when they participate, they only pay lip-service to the negotiation and mediation efforts. However, mediators can build confidence/trust in warring factions through: being honest and open about their mandate and agenda when mediating between warring

factions; creating clear framework for the mediation process and shuttling between the to-be negotiating parties (Isoaho & Tuuli, 2013).

Furthermore, for a successful peace negotiation and mediation process, issues that triggered conflicts such as poor/bad governance, denial of access to justice, high level of human and material insecurity, human rights abuses, youth unemployment and low educational opportunities must be addressed (Amanda & Liezelle, 2018). When these issues are addressed or there are genuine commitments towards addressing them, then peace negotiation and mediation have higher potentials of succeeding. Furthermore, there is the need to recognize and revert to indigenous techniques of peace negotiation and mediation, both in the Mano River Basin and across African societies. The often neglect and disregard for traditional actors, agencies and institutions in peace negotiation and mediation in favour of 'imported' institutions and techniques has proven to be largely ineffective. This shows the need for reversion to indigenous mediation institutions.

Generally, however, to explore possibilities in negotiations and mediation, we recommend the adoption and adherence to the AU's (2014) guidelines for mediation, as a guiding framework which include:

- a. The parties must own the agreement;
- b. Mediation and negotiations should be inclusive of all significant political actors;
- c. Civil society must be involved in the mediation and negotiations;
- d. The mediator(s) must help the parties develop a relationship of trust and cooperation;
- e. Mediation must be a non-threatening venture for the parties;
- f. Mediators must be impartial;
- g. There is no quick-fix solution in deep-rooted conflict;
- h. Mediation must help the parties address the root cause(s) of the conflict;
- i. Mediators must be flexible, creative, responsive and adaptive;
- j. The drafting and implementation of peace agreements should be properly linked (see for instance, Nathan, 2009);
- k. The process must address the regional dimensions of national conflicts; and
- l. There is a need for systematic and rigorous approaches to mediation processes (see for instance, Govender & Ngandu, 2010).

The use of the above framework is to serve as the least benchmark for any actor, individual or agency that wants to engage in peace negotiation and mediation in any society, especially those that have witnessed decades of violence and conflict like the Mano River Basin countries in West Africa.

## Are Chances for Peace Increasing in MRB? Concluding Remarks

The sociology of violence and conflicts in Africa often necessitates the need for a thorough analysis of existing mechanisms that are used to achieve and engender peace, especially that of negotiation and mediation mechanism. This approach has two-way benefits viz, providing an understanding of the negotiation and mediation techniques to achieve peace and the challenges/limitations of these techniques in order to increase their effectiveness and usefulness. The Mano River Basin countries debacle of decades of violence and conflict presented such opportunity to engage in the analysis. Therefore, the study traced the issue of violence and conflicts in Mano region, noting the varied and intertwined nature of the conflicts. The study also examined the various negotiation and mediation techniques used, while pointing out that these techniques, while it has drastically reduced conflicts, have not been able to fully solve the incidence of violence and conflicts in the region. However, the study noted that even though there are limitations, the negotiation and mediation techniques could be improved upon if certain criteria are adopted and used as operational framework for conflict resolution and peacebuilding, not only in the Mano River Basin region but across states and societies in Africa where there are violence and conflicts. A particular focus on traditional structures of peace negotiation and mediation like town-hall initiatives, cultural fraternity (Sandi/Poro) and clan by clan outreaches can help improve peace negotiation and mediation techniques given its explained limitations and challenges. The adoption of these suggested traditional methods and improvement to in-use negotiation and mediation techniques, it is believed, would lessen greatly the incidences of violence and recourse to conflicts, while increasing the chances for peace.

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