

CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RWANDA, BURUNDI, AND THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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ABSTRACT

The Great Lakes Region of Africa has long been characterized by a volatile history of conflict, deeply rooted in ethnic tensions, resource disputes, and political instability. This study presents a comparative analysis of conflict resolution mechanisms in Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, critically evaluating their effectiveness within the broader regional peace-building framework. The research uncovered patterns of success and failure, providing a nuanced understanding of how local, national, and international actors have engaged in peace processes. Rwanda's post-genocide reconciliation model, Burundi's power-sharing arrangements, and the Democratic Republic of Congo's transitional justice mechanisms are examined in detail to assess their sustainability, adaptability, and long-term impact on regional stability. The findings reveal that while each country has made strides in addressing internal conflict, deep-seated challenges remain, often exacerbated by external interventions and the region's complex geopolitical dynamics. Rwanda's Gacaca courts, though effective in fostering grass roots reconciliation, face critiques regarding the marginalization of opposition voices. Burundi's Arusha Agreement, heralded as a milestone in inclusive governance, struggles with entrenched political divisions and recurring violence. In contrast, the Democratic Republic of Congo's disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs are hampered by weak state institutions and pervasive corruption, limiting their efficacy. The study highlights the need for a hybrid model that integrates traditional conflict resolution methods with modern legal frameworks, emphasizing inclusivity, accountability, and regional cooperation as pillars for sustainable peace. This research contributes to the field of conflict resolution by providing a novel comparative framework for evaluating peace processes in conflict-ridden states, offering actionable policy recommendations for strengthening governance, justice, and peace-building efforts in the Great Lakes Region. By identifying the gaps and proposing context-specific solutions, the study offers new insights into how the region can move beyond cyclical violence toward lasting peace and development.

KEYWORDS: Conflict Resolution, Great Lakes Region, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Peace-Building, Transitional Justice, Reconciliation, Governance, Geopolitical Dynamics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Great Lakes Region of Africa, comprising countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is emblematic of a paradox: it is a land of rich natural resources, cultural diversity, and historical significance, yet it has long been defined by recurring cycles of violence and deep-rooted conflicts. The region's tumultuous past is marred by ethnic tensions, political power struggles, and competition over mineral resources, creating an environment where peace remains precarious. As a consequence, conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region has become not only a political and social necessity but a moral imperative. Despite numerous interventions, from local grass roots initiatives to international peace-building missions, a lasting resolution remains elusive. This research delved deeply into the conflict resolution mechanisms deployed in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, analyzing their successes, shortcomings, and potential for long-term peace.

The gravity of the situation in the Great Lakes Region demands a comprehensive and comparative approach to conflict resolution. In Rwanda, the genocide of 1994 left over 800,000 people dead in just 100 days, while millions were displaced (Des Forges, 1999). Following the genocide, Rwanda has become a global case study in post-conflict recovery, with the Gacaca courts serving as a key mechanism for reconciliation and justice. Yet, even as Rwanda emerges as a model of resilience, questions linger regarding the inclusivity of these mechanisms and the long-term impact on ethnic relations (Clark, 2010). Similarly, Burundi has been embroiled in a decades-long civil war that officially ended with the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2000. The power-sharing arrangements in Burundi were lauded for their inclusivity, yet the country's political landscape remains fragile, marked by recurring political violence and failed democratic transitions (Nindorera, 2012). The DRC, on the other hand, presents an even more complex scenario. The Second Congo War, often referred to as Africa's World War, involved nine African nations and led to the death of over five million people (Prunier, 2009). Despite numerous peace agreements and disarmament programs, the DRC continues to grapple with armed militias, weak governance, and widespread corruption (Stearns, 2011).

The comparative nature of this study is both a reflection of the interconnectedness of the conflicts in these three countries and a necessary framework for understanding the broader dynamics of peace and conflict resolution in the region. Rwanda,

Burundi, and the DRC share not only geographic borders but also a history of intertwined ethnic identities and mutual political influences. The spillover effects of violence from one country to another have repeatedly destabilized the region, making national solutions insufficient. As such, this research aims to explore not only how each country has approached conflict resolution individually, but also how regional dynamics and international interventions have shaped these processes. By comparing the conflict resolution mechanisms in these three countries, the study seeks to identify commonalities and differences, offering new insights into the unique and shared challenges that hinder peace-building efforts in the Great Lakes Region.

Moreover, this research addresses a critical gap in the existing literature on conflict resolution by emphasizing the importance of context-specific solutions that integrate both modern legal frameworks and traditional conflict resolution practices. In Rwanda, for example, the Gacaca courts were a unique blend of traditional justice mechanisms with contemporary legal principles, aimed at addressing the massive scale of crimes committed during the genocide (Ingelaere, 2016). Burundi's Arusha Agreement, while rooted in power-sharing, also attempted to incorporate traditional methods of reconciliation, though with limited success. The DRC's disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, heavily influenced by international actors, have struggled to gain traction in part due to the exclusion of local conflict resolution traditions (Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004). This study, therefore, seeks to create new knowledge by exploring the interplay between these modern and traditional mechanisms and proposing a hybrid model that could better address the complex socio-political realities of the region.

In light of the ongoing instability in the Great Lakes Region, this research has not only been timely but urgently needed. The persistence of conflict, despite numerous peace agreements and interventions, highlights the inadequacy of current approaches. There is a growing recognition that top-down, externally driven peace processes often fail to resonate with local populations or address the underlying causes of conflict. This research aims to contribute to the development of more sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms that are rooted in the cultural, political, and historical contexts of Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC. By offering a comparative analysis, the study provides a framework for understanding how conflict resolution mechanisms can be adapted and improved, both within the Great Lakes Region and in other conflict-prone areas around the world.

The study's findings serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, academics, and peace-building practitioners. By examining the strengths and limitations of existing mechanisms, the research offers concrete policy recommendations for enhancing governance, accountability, and regional cooperation. Ultimately, this research moved beyond the cyclical violence that has plagued the Great Lakes Region, proposing pathways toward a more just and peaceful future.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

The Great Lakes Region of Africa has long stood at the epicenter of some of the most devastating conflicts in modern history. Ethnic violence, political instability, and competition for natural resources have fueled wars that transcend national borders and leave in their wake a legacy of deep-seated trauma, displacement, and destruction. Within this volatile context, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have become focal points for both local and international efforts aimed at peace-building and conflict resolution. Each country, while sharing a common history of violence, has developed distinct mechanisms to resolve its conflicts. This overview aims to critically examine these mechanisms, drawing out key successes, challenges, and lessons that can inform future peace-building initiatives both within the Great Lakes Region and beyond.

Conflict resolution in the region has often been shaped by the intricate interplay of local traditions, state-led interventions, and international actors. In Rwanda, following the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, the government introduced the Gacaca courts, a community-based justice system rooted in traditional Rwandan customs (Clark, 2010). The Gacaca courts were designed to facilitate the mass prosecution of genocide perpetrators, while also promoting national reconciliation. Over one million cases were tried through this system, reflecting an unprecedented scale of community engagement. Despite criticisms that the Gacaca process marginalized political dissent and lacked judicial safeguards, it remains a unique example of how indigenous mechanisms can be adapted to address mass atrocities. The Gacaca courts are credited with fostering dialogue and restoring a sense of collective identity, yet they also reveal the limits of localized justice in a highly politicized environment (Ingelaere, 2016). Rwanda's approach, therefore, highlights the potential for traditional mechanisms to complement state-led efforts, though it also underscores the importance of maintaining judicial integrity and inclusivity in the pursuit of peace.

Burundi, similarly, offers a complex narrative of conflict resolution. Decades of ethnic and political violence between Hutu and Tutsi factions culminated in the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2000. The agreement, facilitated by international mediators, introduced a power-sharing framework that sought to balance ethnic representation within the government (Nindorera, 2012). The Burundian approach to conflict resolution has been lauded for its emphasis on inclusivity, as the agreement not only integrated former rebels into the political system but also attempted to address the root causes of conflict by promoting dialogue and institutional reform. However, the persistence of political violence and unrest in Burundi exposes the fragility of power-sharing agreements. Critics argue that the country's political elite has

manipulated the system to entrench their power, while failing to engage meaningfully with civil society or address systemic grievances (Vandeginste, 2015). The Burundian case thus, illustrates the limitations of externally driven peace agreements, particularly when they are not underpinned by strong democratic institutions or genuine political will.

In contrast, the Democratic Republic of Congo presents an even more multifaceted and protracted challenge. The DRC has been embroiled in ongoing conflict since the late 1990s, with numerous internal and external actors contributing to a web of violence that has claimed millions of lives (Stearns, 2011). Conflict resolution efforts in the DRC have largely centered around Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs, coupled with international peacekeeping missions such as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). These mechanisms, while essential in containing violence, have often struggled to gain traction. DDR programs in the DRC have faced significant challenges, including weak state capacity, corruption, and the re-emergence of armed groups (Autesserre, 2010). Furthermore, the lack of effective governance and widespread impunity have undermined efforts to establish sustainable peace. The DRC's experience highlights the difficulties of implementing conflict resolution mechanisms in a context where state institutions are fragile, and where local conflicts are deeply intertwined with regional and international interests.

A critical assessment of these mechanisms reveals that while each country in the Great Lakes Region has made progress in its peace-building efforts, common challenges persist. One of the most significant issues is the tension between local and international approaches to conflict resolution. In Rwanda, the Gacaca courts represented a successful adaptation of local traditions, yet they were heavily criticized by international human rights organizations for failing to meet international legal standards (Clark, 2010). In Burundi, the Arusha Agreement, largely shaped by external actors, has been praised for promoting inclusivity but criticized for its top-down implementation, which has at times alienated local communities (Nindorera, 2012). Similarly, in the DRC, international DDR programs have struggled to align with the complex realities of local conflicts, often failing to address the root causes of violence at the community level (Autesserre, 2010).

Moreover, the comparative study of Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC reveals that effective conflict resolution mechanisms must balance short-term stabilization with long-term peace-building. In Rwanda, the Gacaca courts provided a rapid means of addressing the vast number of genocide cases, but questions remain about whether they have fostered lasting reconciliation (Ingelaere, 2016). In Burundi, the power-sharing arrangements helped to stabilize the country in the immediate aftermath of the civil war, but the recurrence of political violence suggests that deeper societal divisions have not been fully addressed (Vandeginste, 2015). The DRC's experience with DDR programs demonstrates that while these initiatives can reduce the number of active combatants, they are insufficient in the absence of broader governance reforms and efforts to address the economic and social drivers of conflict (Stearns, 2011).

In addition to these challenges, the Great Lakes Region is marked by significant regional and international dynamics that complicate conflict resolution efforts. The porous borders between Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC allow for the easy movement of armed groups and refugees, exacerbating existing tensions and creating spillover effects that undermine national peace processes (Prunier, 2009). The involvement of external actors, whether in the form of peacekeepers, foreign governments, or international NGOs, has further complicated efforts to establish locally owned and sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms (Autesserre, 2010). As such, any successful peace-building strategy in the region must take into account these transnational dynamics and the need for greater regional cooperation.

In conclusion, the conflict resolution mechanisms in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC present a rich tapestry of both innovation and challenge. From the grass roots Gacaca courts in Rwanda to the internationally brokered Arusha Agreement in Burundi and the complex DDR programs in the DRC, these countries have experimented with a wide range of approaches. However, the persistent instability in the Great Lakes Region underscores the need for more integrated and context-sensitive conflict resolution strategies. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse by offering a comparative analysis that highlights the strengths and weaknesses of these mechanisms, providing new insights into how the region can move beyond cyclical violence toward sustainable peace.

3. CURRENT STATE OF CONFLICTS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

The Great Lakes Region of Africa continues to grapple with one of the most persistent cycles of conflict globally. Defined by deep ethnic divides, resource-driven violence, and fragile political systems, the region comprising Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains a complex battleground for both local and international actors. The current state of conflicts in this region is emblematic of the paradox that has long haunted it: despite numerous peace agreements, international interventions, and grass roots efforts, the region's conflicts persist, mutating into new forms and intensifying the humanitarian crises faced by millions. The volatility of the Great Lakes Region underscores the limitations of existing conflict resolution mechanisms, revealing the urgent need for more adaptive, sustainable, and locally rooted approaches. This section provides an in-depth analysis of the ongoing conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, highlighting the interconnectedness of their respective challenges and the broader regional dynamics at play.

The Democratic Republic of Congo remains the epicenter of conflict in the region. The Second Congo War (1998–2003), which involved nine African countries and multiple rebel groups, may have formally ended with the Sun City Agreement in 2003, but the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu are still embroiled in violence. Rebel groups such as the March

M23 Movement (M23), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and various Mai-Mai militias continue to engage in deadly clashes with government forces and among themselves. The DRC's vast mineral wealth including diamonds, coltan, and cobalt has fueled the war economy, turning local conflict into an international commodity battle, where external powers and multinational corporations are often implicated in perpetuating violence (Stearns, 2011). Even as international peacekeepers under the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) remain deployed, their presence has done little to curb the violence or protect civilians from atrocities, highlighting the inadequacies of traditional peacekeeping in the face of such complex, multi-layered conflicts (Autesserre, 2010).

The resurgence of M23 in 2021-2022, despite its earlier defeat, underscores the cyclical nature of conflict in the DRC. The group, which claims to represent the Tutsi population in the eastern Congo, has capitalized on the region's weak governance structures and porous borders to reassert its control over key territories. The fragile peace agreements that once held the promise of ending hostilities have been repeatedly violated, further eroding trust between the Congolese government and rebel factions (Prunier, 2009). The DRC's internal conflicts are deeply intertwined with its neighbours, particularly Rwanda and Uganda, both of which have been accused of supporting rebel groups in pursuit of their strategic interests (Stearns, 2011). This transnational dimension of conflict complicates any efforts to establish a lasting peace, as regional powers continue to engage in proxy wars, using armed groups as leverage to assert their influence in the resource-rich eastern Congo.

In Burundi, the political situation remains fragile, despite the nominal end of the civil war following the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2000. Political violence in Burundi intensified in 2015 when President Pierre Nkurunziza announced his bid for a third term, in what many viewed as a violation of the Arusha Agreement's provisions on term limits. The resulting protests and government crackdowns led to hundreds of deaths, widespread repression, and the displacement of over 400,000 people (Nindorera, 2012). While Nkurunziza's death in 2020 and the election of his successor, Évariste Ndayishimiye, have calmed some of the unrest, the underlying tensions remain. The ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, continues to dominate the political landscape, marginalizing opposition groups and restricting civic space. Reports of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and forced disappearances perpetuate a climate of fear, stifling any meaningful progress toward reconciliation and political reform (Vandeginste, 2015). The power-sharing mechanisms established by the Arusha Agreement, once heralded as a model for post-conflict governance, have been undermined by the government's increasingly authoritarian tendencies. As a result, the political crisis in Burundi, while less violent than in previous years, is far from resolved, and the potential for renewed conflict remains high.

Rwanda, in contrast to its neighbours, has achieved remarkable post-genocide stability, yet this stability is precarious and comes at a high cost. The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi left an indelible mark on the country, and since then, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) under President Paul Kagame has maintained tight control over the political and social life of the nation. The government has implemented a series of ambitious economic reforms, positioning Rwanda as a hub for regional trade and innovation, while also heavily investing in the country's security apparatus (Clark, 2010). However, critics argue that Rwanda's peace is a "negative peace" one sustained through repression rather than genuine reconciliation. Dissent is not tolerated, and political opposition is often met with imprisonment or exile. Human rights organizations have raised concerns about the suppression of free speech and the lack of democratic freedoms in the country (Reyntjens, 2011). While Rwanda's Gacaca courts successfully prosecuted over a million genocide cases, the long-term effectiveness of this justice mechanism in healing the deep-rooted ethnic divisions remains contested. Moreover, Rwanda's military incursions into the eastern DRC ostensibly to neutralize Hutu militias such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) continue to strain relations with the Congolese government and contribute to regional instability (Prunier, 2009). Thus, while Rwanda has made significant strides in rebuilding after the genocide, its internal and external conflicts illustrate the delicate balance between peace and repression in the region.

The current state of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region cannot be fully understood without considering the broader geopolitical landscape. The porous borders between Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, combined with the legacy of colonialism and the strategic interests of external powers, have created a volatile environment where conflict easily transcends national boundaries. The involvement of regional actors such as Uganda and Tanzania and international organizations further complicates the dynamics of peace-building. The failure of regional bodies, such as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), to effectively mediate and resolve disputes highlights the limitations of regional cooperation in addressing these deeply entrenched conflicts (Prunier, 2009). Furthermore, international peacekeeping efforts, while well-intentioned, have often been criticized for their inability to adapt to the complexities of the region. MONUSCO, the largest and most expensive UN peacekeeping mission in the world, has faced numerous accusations of ineffectiveness, particularly in protecting civilians from rebel attacks and human rights abuses (Autesserre, 2010). This inability to foster a sustainable peace underscores the urgent need for conflict resolution mechanisms that are rooted in local contexts and informed by the realities on the ground.

The humanitarian impact of the ongoing conflicts in the Great Lakes Region cannot be overstated. Millions of people have been displaced, forced to flee their homes in search of safety and stability. Refugee camps in neighbouring countries, such as Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya, continue to swell with those escaping violence in the DRC and Burundi. The human cost of these conflicts is compounded by the widespread poverty, food insecurity, and lack of access to basic services that plague

the region. Women and children, in particular, bear the brunt of the violence, as they are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, forced recruitment into armed groups, and exploitation in the war economy (Autesserre, 2010). The enduring conflicts in the Great Lakes Region are not merely political or economic struggles; they represent a profound humanitarian crisis that demands urgent attention from both regional leaders and the international community.

In conclusion, the current state of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region reflects a complex web of historical grievances, political power struggles, and transnational dynamics. While Rwanda has achieved relative stability, it does so under a tight regime of political control, and its role in the DRC continues to fuel regional tensions. Burundi, meanwhile, remains on a knife-edge, with the potential for renewed violence lurking beneath the surface. The DRC, despite numerous peace agreements, remains the most volatile of the three, with ongoing rebel activity and weak state institutions perpetuating cycles of violence. The interconnectedness of these conflicts, coupled with the involvement of external actors, suggests that any effective conflict resolution mechanism must be regional in scope, adaptive to local contexts, and committed to addressing the root causes of violence.

4. GLOBAL COMPARATIVE STATE OF CONFLICTS WITH THE GREAT LAKES REGION IN AFRICA

The Great Lakes Region of Africa, comprising Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), stands as one of the most conflict-ridden regions in the world, illustrating the deep complexities of post-colonial state-building, resource competition, and ethnic tensions. While the conflicts in this region are unique in their historical and cultural contexts, they share certain characteristics with other regions globally that have endured protracted conflict. A comparative analysis of global conflict zones, from the Middle East and South Asia to Latin America and the Balkans, sheds light on the nuances of the Great Lakes' crises, highlighting both shared dynamics and critical differences. This comparative framework not only allows for a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by the Great Lakes Region but also provides insights into potential conflict resolution mechanisms that have been successful elsewhere.

Globally, regions such as the Middle East have long been emblematic of protracted, intractable conflicts. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, like the Great Lakes conflicts, is rooted in historical grievances, identity-based divisions, and contestation over land and resources (Tessler, 2009). Both conflicts exhibit the cyclical nature of violence, where periods of relative peace are often short-lived and followed by renewed hostilities. In the case of the Great Lakes Region, the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide saw temporary stability, but this was followed by the spillover of conflicts into neighbouring Burundi and the DRC. Similarly, in the Middle East, ceasefire agreements and peace processes, such as the Oslo Accords, have failed to establish lasting peace, with each side continuing to view the other as an existential threat (Khalidi, 2006). While the Great Lakes Region differs in the specific ethnic and political contexts, the persistence of identity-driven conflict and the failure of peace agreements to address underlying grievances present a striking parallel.

In both the Great Lakes Region and the Middle East, external actors have played pivotal roles, often exacerbating conflicts rather than resolving them. In the case of the DRC, neighbouring countries such as Rwanda and Uganda have been accused of supporting rebel groups to advance their own interests, particularly in the resource-rich eastern Congo (Prunier, 2009). This is comparable to the involvement of regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United States in the Middle East, where proxy wars have further fueled conflicts in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq (Gause, 2014). The transnational nature of these conflicts, in both regions, underscores the difficulty of resolving them through traditional peace negotiations, which typically focus on state actors while ignoring the influence of non-state actors and external powers.

A closer comparison can also be drawn between the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region and those in South Asia, particularly in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Afghanistan's decades-long conflict, like that of the DRC, has been marked by the involvement of foreign powers and the failure of state institutions to control armed groups operating within its borders (Rubin, 2002). The Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan mirrors the re-emergence of groups like the M23 in the DRC, which continue to undermine peace efforts despite the presence of international peacekeeping forces. In both cases, the weak central authority of the state, coupled with the vast, difficult-to-govern terrain, has allowed insurgent groups to thrive, perpetuating cycles of violence. Similarly, in Kashmir, the long-standing dispute between India and Pakistan over territory has resulted in frequent cross-border skirmishes and a protracted insurgency, drawing parallels to the conflicts between Rwanda, Uganda, and the DRC, where cross-border dynamics play a significant role in destabilizing the region (Bose, 2003).

Latin America provides another instructive comparison, particularly regarding the role of resource competition in fueling conflict. In Colombia, decades of violence have been driven by the control of valuable resources, such as cocaine production and emerald mines, much like the DRC's conflicts over coltan, diamonds, and other minerals (Leech, 2011). Rebel groups such as the FARC in Colombia and the Mai-Mai militias in the DRC have both used natural resources to finance their operations, making it difficult to achieve a sustainable peace in either region. In both Colombia and the DRC, peace agreements have been signed, but the presence of lucrative resources continues to incentivize violence, with armed groups and corrupt officials undermining efforts to establish long-term stability (Richani, 2013). The comparison underscores a critical challenge in conflict resolution: the need to address the economic drivers of conflict, particularly in regions where the state is unable to exert control over resource-rich territories.

While these global comparisons highlight the shared dynamics of protracted conflict, the Great Lakes Region is unique in its deeply intertwined ethnic conflicts, particularly between the Hutu and Tutsi populations. While ethnic conflicts exist in other parts of the world such as the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar and the sectarian violence in Iraq the specific historical context of the Rwandan genocide and the subsequent regional dynamics set the Great Lakes Region apart. The ethnic divisions in the region have been compounded by colonial legacies, where European powers manipulated and exacerbated these divisions to maintain control (Mamdani, 2001). This legacy continues to shape the politics of the region, where ethnic identity is closely tied to access to power and resources. In contrast, while ethnic and sectarian divisions are present in other global conflict zones, the intensity and duration of ethnic-based violence in the Great Lakes Region have left a particularly deep scar on its societies.

In the Balkans, the wars of the 1990s following the dissolution of Yugoslavia provide another instructive comparison. Like the Great Lakes Region, the Balkans saw horrific ethnic cleansing, most notably in Bosnia and Kosovo, where ethnic tensions between Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks erupted into full-scale war (Ramet, 2006). The international community's response to the Balkans conflict, particularly through the intervention of NATO and the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), offers valuable lessons for the Great Lakes Region. While the ICTY succeeded in prosecuting key figures responsible for war crimes, the ongoing instability in the Great Lakes Region highlights the limitations of international justice mechanisms when they are not accompanied by broader efforts to address the root causes of conflict. Moreover, the Dayton Accords, which brought an end to the Bosnian War, created a highly decentralized and ethnically divided political system that has struggled to maintain peace (Chandler, 2000). This presents a cautionary tale for the Great Lakes Region, where power-sharing agreements such as the Arusha Peace Agreement in Burundi have similarly struggled to foster long-term stability in deeply divided societies.

Despite these global parallels, the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region exhibit certain characteristics that distinguish them from other conflict zones. The sheer scale of displacement over 5 million people are currently displaced in the DRC alone makes it one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world (Autesserre, 2010). The prevalence of sexual violence as a weapon of war in the region, particularly in the DRC, has also drawn international attention, with some referring to it as the "rape capital of the world" (Prunier, 2009). While sexual violence is a feature of many conflicts globally, the systematic and widespread nature of this violence in the Great Lakes Region underscores the particular brutality of these conflicts and the profound impact on civilian populations.

In conclusion, the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region share many similarities with other global conflict zones, particularly in terms of the cyclical nature of violence, the involvement of external actors, and the role of resource competition in perpetuating conflict. However, the region is unique in the intensity of its ethnic divisions, the legacy of colonialism, and the scale of its humanitarian crises. A global comparative analysis highlights both the commonalities and distinctions of the Great Lakes' conflicts, providing valuable insights into potential conflict resolution mechanisms. Learning from other regions' successes and failures in conflict resolution whether through power-sharing agreements, international interventions, or grass roots peace-building initiatives offers critical lessons for addressing the deeply entrenched conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC. Ultimately, any solution for the Great Lakes Region must be rooted in a deep understanding of the region's specific historical, political, and social context, while also drawing on global experiences to craft a more comprehensive and sustainable peace.

5. LEGAL AND POLICY APPLICATION FRAMEWORK OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION OF AFRICA

The Great Lakes Region of Africa, encompassing Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is one of the most volatile areas in the world, marked by historical and contemporary conflicts, ethno-political violence, and contested resource control. Despite decades of interventions, the persistence of conflict in this region has brought to light the inadequacies of traditional peace-building strategies. However, the development and application of a robust legal and policy framework, grounded in both international and regional law, offers a unique opportunity to reimagine conflict resolution mechanisms in the region. The interplay of these legal frameworks with indigenous peace-building initiatives highlights the need for context-specific solutions capable of bridging the gap between international norms and local realities.

The legal frameworks that govern conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region are rooted in international humanitarian law, human rights law, and regional legal instruments. At the international level, mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) have been instrumental in addressing the gross human rights violations in the region. The Rome Statute, which established the ICC, underscores the principle of complementarity, allowing states the primary responsibility to prosecute international crimes while acting as a court of last resort when national systems fail (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998). Rwanda, in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, sought to employ both national mechanisms and the ICTR to prosecute those responsible for the genocide, aiming to establish a dual framework of justice that blended international and domestic accountability (Mamdani, 2001). This collaboration between international and domestic legal systems illustrates the importance of a layered approach to conflict resolution that balances global standards with local jurisdiction.

Regionally, the legal frameworks of the African Union (AU) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region

(ICGLR) provide critical policy direction for conflict resolution in the Great Lakes. The AU's Constitutive Act, adopted in 2000, enshrined the principle of non-indifference, asserting the union's right to intervene in member states in cases of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity (African Union Constitutive Act, 2000). This departure from the strict non-interference doctrine of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was a bold move toward prioritizing human security over state sovereignty. The AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC), created in 2004, serves as the primary organ for conflict prevention and resolution across Africa, deploying various peacekeeping missions to stabilize conflict zones, including the Great Lakes Region (AU Peace and Security Council, 2004). However, the efficacy of AU interventions has often been constrained by limited resources, competing political interests, and a lack of coordination with local actors.

The ICGLR, established in 2000, also plays a significant role in shaping the policy framework for peace-building in the Great Lakes. The 2006 Pact on Security, Stability, and Development in the Great Lakes Region and its Protocols aim to address the root causes of conflict, including weak governance, human rights abuses, and economic instability. The Pact promotes conflict prevention through a multi-sectoral approach, encompassing political, economic, and social interventions (ICGLR, 2006). In Burundi, the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of 2000, which was negotiated under the auspices of regional leaders and supported by the ICGLR, was instrumental in ending the country's civil war (Lemarchand, 2009). This agreement highlighted the need for regional collaboration in addressing conflict and paved the way for the integration of rebel groups into the political process. However, the failure to fully implement the agreement's provisions, particularly regarding disarmament and political reform, underscores the limitations of regional legal frameworks when they are not backed by strong enforcement mechanisms.

While international and regional legal frameworks provide overarching guidelines, the practical application of these laws requires robust national policies that are tailored to the unique historical and socio-political contexts of each country in the Great Lakes Region. Rwanda, for example, has established a unique legal mechanism in the form of the Gacaca courts, which combined elements of traditional justice with formal legal processes to prosecute individuals involved in the 1994 genocide (Clark, 2010). The Gacaca courts, while criticized for their lack of due process protections, represented an innovative approach to addressing the massive backlog of genocide cases and promoting national reconciliation. This hybrid legal model reflects the importance of context-sensitive legal frameworks that incorporate local traditions and practices into formal conflict resolution mechanisms.

In the DRC, however, the application of legal frameworks has been hampered by the state's inability to exert control over vast swathes of its territory. The Congolese judicial system remains weak, underfunded, and riddled with corruption, making it ill-equipped to handle the numerous war crimes and human rights violations that have occurred during the country's protracted conflict (Autesserre, 2010). Despite the presence of MONUSCO, the UN's largest peacekeeping mission, the DRC has struggled to implement national legal reforms or to hold accountable the myriad rebel groups that continue to destabilize the region. This highlights the importance of strengthening national institutions and aligning them with international legal norms to ensure that conflict resolution mechanisms are effective and sustainable.

Policy application in conflict resolution also extends beyond the legal domain to include economic and social development frameworks that address the root causes of violence. In this regard, the African Union's Agenda 2063 (The Africa we Want in 2063) and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer critical policy frameworks aimed at fostering peace and development in conflict-affected regions. The AU's Agenda 2063, particularly its aspiration for a peaceful and secure Africa, emphasizes the importance of inclusive governance, respect for human rights, and the development of conflict resolution institutions at the national, regional, and continental levels (AU Agenda 2063, 2015). This policy framework echoes the need for a holistic approach to conflict resolution that not only focuses on political settlements but also on addressing the socio-economic inequalities that fuel conflict in the Great Lakes Region. The SDGs, specifically Goal 16, which promotes peace, justice, and strong institutions, further reinforces the link between development and conflict resolution, calling for transparent, inclusive, and accountable institutions at all levels (United Nations, 2015).

However, while international and regional policy frameworks are essential in shaping conflict resolution strategies, their effectiveness hinges on the political will and commitment of national governments. In Burundi, the authoritarian turn of President Pierre Nkurunziza in 2015, when he sought a controversial third term in office, plunged the country back into violence, undoing much of the progress made through the Arusha Agreement (Curtis, 2016). This regression highlights the fragility of peace settlements in the Great Lakes Region when national leaders prioritize personal power over the collective good. As a result, there is a growing recognition that conflict resolution mechanisms must be coupled with robust political reforms that promote democratic governance, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

Moreover, the integration of gender perspectives into the legal and policy framework of conflict resolution is gaining recognition as a critical component of sustainable peace. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security calls for the inclusion of women in all levels of peace processes, recognizing that women are disproportionately affected by conflict and play a crucial role in peace-building (UNSC, 2000). In the Great Lakes Region, women's participation in peace processes has often been limited, despite their active involvement in grass roots peace-building initiatives. Efforts to mainstream gender in conflict resolution policies, such as the African Union's Gender Strategy, are critical in ensuring that peace processes are inclusive and reflective of the needs of all members of society (AU Gender Strategy, 2017).

In conclusion, the legal and policy framework for conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region of Africa is a complex and evolving tapestry of international, regional, and national laws, intertwined with indigenous practices and contemporary policy developments. The successes and failures of these frameworks reveal that while legal norms provide essential guidance, their practical application requires political will, institutional capacity, and the active participation of local communities. Moving forward, a more integrated approach that balances global legal standards with the unique socio-political realities of the Great Lakes Region is needed to create more effective and sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms. The lessons drawn from this comparative study provide an essential foundation for the development of new knowledge and innovative solutions tailored to the challenges of peace-building in one of Africa's most conflict-prone regions.

6. GLOBAL COMPARATIVE STATE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS WITH THE GREAT LAKES REGION OF AFRICA

The Great Lakes Region of Africa, particularly Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has long been a cauldron of protracted conflict, ethnic tensions, and political instability. Despite numerous regional and international efforts, a sustainable peace remains elusive. To gain insights into more effective conflict resolution mechanisms, it is crucial to compare the approaches used in the Great Lakes Region with those deployed in other global conflict zones. By examining successful and failed interventions in different parts of the world, a broader understanding emerges, providing critical lessons and new frameworks that can be adapted to the unique challenges of this region. From the Balkans to South Asia, Latin America to the Middle East, a comparative analysis highlights the necessity of blending local context with global strategies to achieve lasting peace.

Conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region, much like other conflict-prone areas, has involved a myriad of local, regional, and international actors. However, the persistence of ethnic divisions, deep-rooted grievances, and competition for natural resources complicates peace-building efforts. Globally, regions such as the Balkans have grappled with similar challenges. The breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s ignited a series of ethnic conflicts, much like those seen in Rwanda and Burundi, where the Hutu-Tutsi divide has long been a source of violence. International intervention in the Balkans, most notably through the Dayton Accords of 1995, resulted in a complex power-sharing arrangement that brought an end to large-scale violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Chandler, 2000). Yet, the Great Lakes Region has seen multiple peace accords, such as the Arusha Peace Agreement of 2000 in Burundi, fail to yield the same long-term stability, indicating that the region's deeper socio-political fabric demands more comprehensive, inclusive solutions (Lemarchand, 2009).

The comparative analysis reveals that successful conflict resolution mechanisms must address both immediate cessation of violence and the long-term political and social reconstruction of divided societies. In South Africa, for instance, the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) created a model for healing the scars of ethnic and racial violence (Tutu, 1999). While the TRC's success hinged on the willingness of the country's leadership and civil society to engage in truth-telling and forgiveness, the Great Lakes Region has largely lacked such robust transitional justice frameworks. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) prosecuted key figures responsible for the 1994 genocide, but it failed to foster national healing in the same way South Africa's TRC did, underscoring the importance of addressing collective grievances alongside individual accountability (Mamdani, 2001).

Similarly, conflict resolution mechanisms in Colombia offer another comparative lens through which the Great Lakes Region's efforts can be evaluated. The 2016 peace deal between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) brought a historic end to five decades of armed conflict. This agreement included provisions for political participation of former rebels, reparations for victims, and land reform issues that echo many of the underlying grievances in the Great Lakes Region, where land disputes and political exclusion fuel recurring violence (Richani, 2013). However, the implementation of Colombia's peace process has faced significant challenges, including the resurgence of dissident factions and paramilitary violence, pointing to the complexity of integrating former combatants into society. The Great Lakes Region, where rebel groups like M23 in the DRC continue to destabilize the region despite multiple peace agreements, can draw valuable lessons from Colombia's emphasis on reintegration and addressing the socio-economic roots of conflict (Autesserre, 2010).

In the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon, a different model of conflict resolution has been applied. The 1989 Taif Agreement ended the Lebanese Civil War by establishing a confessional political system that divided power among the country's various religious sects. While this arrangement brought temporary peace, it also entrenched sectarian divisions and has been blamed for the country's ongoing political paralysis and intermittent violence (Makdisi, 1996). In the Great Lakes Region, power-sharing agreements have been a common feature of peace deals, such as the aforementioned Arusha Peace Agreement in Burundi. However, these arrangements often solidify ethnic and political cleavages, rather than promoting genuine reconciliation and national unity. A critical analysis of the Taif model highlights the risks of formalizing ethnic or sectarian identities within political structures, suggesting that the Great Lakes Region requires more innovative, integrative approaches to governance (Prunier, 2009).

One of the most innovative and impactful global conflict resolution mechanisms is the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, which successfully ended decades of sectarian violence between Protestant Unionists and Catholic Nationalists.

The agreement's success lay in its ability to address both political and identity-based grievances, offering a framework for shared governance, disarmament, and institutional reform (Hancock, 1998). Furthermore, the involvement of civil society and grass roots peace-building initiatives played a pivotal role in sustaining the peace process. In contrast, the Great Lakes Region has often seen top-down approaches to peace-building, where international actors such as the United Nations impose solutions without adequately engaging local communities. The success of the Good Friday Agreement suggests that for peace to be sustainable in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, grass roots participation and bottom-up conflict resolution mechanisms must be prioritized (Lederach, 2003).

Further comparisons can be drawn from the peace-building efforts in post-genocide Rwanda, which introduced the Gacaca courts as a hybrid local and state mechanism to address the aftermath of the genocide. The Gacaca system sought to involve communities in the process of justice and reconciliation by enabling local courts to try lower-level perpetrators of genocide (Clark, 2010). While lauded for its innovation and inclusivity, the Gacaca system also faced criticism for its lack of legal safeguards and the potential for retribution (Mamdani, 2001). Despite these flaws, the Gacaca courts offer a valuable case study in how locally-driven justice mechanisms can complement formal judicial processes, a model that could be adapted to address conflicts in other parts of the Great Lakes Region, where communities have long been marginalized from national decision-making processes.

While international interventions have often been viewed as essential in conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region, global experience also highlights the limits of external involvement. The role of NATO in the Balkans, the United States in Afghanistan, and various UN missions in Africa underscore that military interventions alone rarely result in sustainable peace. In the DRC, for instance, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has been criticized for its inability to curb violence, despite being one of the largest and longest-running peacekeeping operations in the world (Autesserre, 2010). This reflects a broader global lesson: external peacekeepers can only provide short-term stability, while the long-term resolution of conflicts requires building local capacity for governance, security, and economic development. Drawing from examples like Afghanistan, where heavy reliance on foreign troops has not translated into lasting peace, the Great Lakes Region must focus on empowering local actors and institutions to take the lead in conflict resolution (Rubin, 2002).

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of conflict resolution mechanisms globally demonstrates that while certain strategies—such as power-sharing, transitional justice, and international peacekeeping—have been applied in the Great Lakes Region, their success depends heavily on the local context and the engagement of communities. The region's unique combination of ethnic conflict, resource-driven violence, and weak state institutions requires a multi-faceted approach that draws on global best practices while remaining deeply rooted in local realities. The creation of new knowledge in this field lies in synthesizing these comparative insights and proposing more contextually appropriate mechanisms for conflict resolution. This includes a stronger emphasis on grassroots peace-building, the integration of traditional justice systems, and the development of more inclusive political structures that transcend ethnic divisions. By learning from both the successes and failures of other conflict-affected regions, Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC can chart a path towards a more sustainable and inclusive peace.

7. LITERATURE REVIEW RESULTS ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION OF AFRICA

The Great Lakes Region of Africa, encompassing Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has been subject to substantial scholarly investigation, given its protracted conflicts, high levels of ethnic violence, and the geopolitical implications of peace and stability in the region. Previous research has focused extensively on historical causes of conflicts, external interventions, and peace-building processes, yet numerous gaps persist in understanding the efficacy and adaptability of conflict resolution mechanisms that incorporate legal, political, and socio-economic frameworks specific to this region. This thesis aims to fill those critical research voids by introducing a comparative approach that evaluates the nuances of conflict resolution mechanisms in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, highlighting both their successes and failures, while advocating for innovative, locally adapted solutions that merge global legal frameworks with indigenous practices.

7.1 REVIEW OF HISTORICAL AND STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

Numerous studies have scrutinized the historical and structural roots of conflict in the Great Lakes Region, with particular emphasis on colonial legacies, ethnic divisions, and resource competition (Autesserre, 2010; Lemarchand, 2009). Scholars such as Mahmood Mamdani (2001) argue that colonial policies of divide-and-rule in Rwanda and Burundi entrenched ethnic identities in a manner that rendered post-colonial state-building efforts vulnerable to violent breakdowns. Similarly, in the DRC, the fragmentation of state authority and the persistent exploitation of natural resources by local and foreign actors have sustained cycles of violence and conflict (Prunier, 2009). These studies rightly illuminate the deep-rooted socio-political and economic forces driving instability, yet they often neglect how evolving legal and policy frameworks could provide new pathways for conflict resolution, particularly through locally adaptable mechanisms.

The existing literature emphasizes conflict drivers but underestimates the potential of legal frameworks both international and regional combined with local traditions to foster sustainable peace. This thesis seeks to bridge this gap by providing a

comparative analysis of how Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC have employed legal tools and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, like Rwanda's Gacaca courts, to deal with the aftermath of violence (Clark, 2010). This analysis moves beyond the common focus on colonial legacies to explore how these tools can be effectively combined and adapted to local contexts, offering a more holistic understanding of conflict resolution.

7.2 LEGAL AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The application of international legal frameworks, such as the Rome Statute and the African Union's Constitutive Act, has played a central role in shaping post-conflict interventions in the Great Lakes Region. The Rome Statute's principle of complementarity, as discussed by scholars like El Zeidy (2002), offers a blueprint for how national judicial systems can engage with international institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC). Rwanda's use of both international and domestic judicial measures, including the establishment of the ICTR and Gacaca courts, has been lauded for its dual approach to justice (Clark, 2010), but gaps remain in understanding how similar frameworks could be tailored to the unique contexts of Burundi and the DRC.

In Burundi, the Arusha Agreement of 2000 stands as a significant legal and political framework aimed at ending civil war and ethnic conflict (Curtis, 2016). Despite initial success, the resurgence of violence following political crises highlights the limitations of externally imposed peace settlements that lack deep integration with local governance structures. Similarly, the DRC's institutional weakness hampers its ability to implement international legal mechanisms effectively, leaving room for continued impunity and insecurity. The literature has often pointed to institutional failures, yet what remains underexplored is how these failures can be mitigated through a more context-sensitive adaptation of legal mechanisms.

This thesis addresses the research gap by proposing a reimagined framework for conflict resolution that emphasizes flexibility and local ownership. While past research has documented the legal frameworks available to these countries, this study explores how local customs, such as Ubushingantahe in Burundi, can be integrated with formal legal mechanisms to offer more effective and enduring solutions to conflict. This locally embedded legal pluralism has received limited attention in previous studies, which have often focused on international norms without adequately considering indigenous approaches.

7.3 THE ROLE OF REGIONAL ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS

Regional institutions such as the African Union (AU) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) have been critical in shaping conflict resolution efforts in the region. The AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the ICGLR's Pact on Security, Stability, and Development (2006) are often cited as landmark initiatives to foster peace in the Great Lakes (AU Constitutive Act, 2000; ICGLR, 2006). Despite these frameworks, however, there is a consensus in the literature that regional efforts have been marred by inconsistent enforcement, inadequate funding, and lack of political will from member states (Murithi, 2009; Williams, 2011).

Although existing literature recognizes the role of regional institutions, it fails to explore how these bodies could work in synergy with local conflict resolution efforts. This thesis posits that the effectiveness of regional interventions can be enhanced when coupled with a robust understanding of local dynamics and conflict drivers. It advances the argument that regional bodies like the AU must move beyond a top-down approach, engaging more deeply with community-based peace initiatives and legal mechanisms that reflect the socio-political landscapes of Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC.

7.4 PEACEBUILDING AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES

Research on post-conflict reconciliation mechanisms in the Great Lakes Region has predominantly focused on transitional justice models, particularly in Rwanda (Gready, 2011; Sarkin, 2001). The Gacaca courts in Rwanda, while lauded for their ability to process vast numbers of cases, have also been criticized for procedural deficiencies and the potential for exacerbating ethnic divisions (Clark, 2010). Burundi's reconciliation efforts, largely framed around the Arusha Accords, have also faced setbacks, especially due to the country's ongoing political instability and incomplete disarmament efforts (Nindorera, 2017).

The gaps in this body of literature lie in the failure to examine the full potential of indigenous reconciliation mechanisms across the entire Great Lakes Region. This thesis expands upon existing knowledge by critically evaluating reconciliation processes in all three countries, drawing from both formal and informal mechanisms, such as Rwanda's Gacaca courts and Burundi's Ubushingantahe councils (Lemarchand, 1996). It highlights how hybrid models that incorporate both formal legal systems and indigenous practices could offer more inclusive and culturally relevant pathways to reconciliation.

7.5 NEW CONTRIBUTIONS AND CLOSING RESEARCH GAPS

Despite substantial research on conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region, existing studies often examine each country's conflict resolution mechanisms in isolation, neglecting a broader comparative perspective. This thesis provides a new contribution by comparatively analyzing the conflict resolution approaches of Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, identifying shared challenges and unique successes. By highlighting the interplay of international legal frameworks, regional governance, and local peace-building traditions, this study develops a more nuanced understanding of conflict resolution that transcends national borders.

Moreover, this research addresses the critical gap in existing literature regarding the integration of local conflict resolution practices with formal legal mechanisms. While previous studies have acknowledged the role of traditional practices, few have thoroughly examined how these can be harmonized with international norms to create hybrid models of justice that are both effective and culturally resonant. By incorporating these underexplored elements, this thesis offers a more comprehensive, adaptable framework for conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region, contributing to the growing body of knowledge in peace and conflict studies.

8. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON WHICH THE RESEARCH IS HINGED

The conflict resolution mechanisms in the Great Lakes Region of Africa have evolved amidst a complex web of ethnic, political, economic, and historical factors that have fueled some of the world's most protracted conflicts. To engage deeply with this multifaceted reality, this thesis is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates theories from conflict resolution, post-colonial studies, restorative justice, and state fragility. These theories were selected not only for their relevance to the region but also for their potential to illuminate new pathways for peace-building, as examined through the case studies of Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

8.1 CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION THEORY

At the core of this research is the application of Conflict Transformation Theory, pioneered by Johan Galtung and John Paul Lederach, which goes beyond the resolution of conflict to encompass a broader understanding of the deep structural causes of violence. This theory emphasizes that conflicts are not merely isolated events to be ended, but rather, opportunities to transform relationships, structures, and perceptions that perpetuate violence. According to Lederach (2003), conflict transformation seeks to address the root causes of conflict, such as inequalities and injustices, and envisions peace as an ongoing process of reconciliation, justice, and the building of sustainable institutions.

In the context of the Great Lakes Region, where historical injustices ranging from colonial legacies to ethnic divisions have deeply embedded themselves into the social fabric, conflict transformation provides a critical lens for understanding how to approach long-term peace. For instance, the Gacaca courts in Rwanda, which sought to rebuild relationships broken by genocide through restorative justice, are reflective of the principles of conflict transformation (Clark, 2010). By combining modern and traditional mechanisms, Gacaca attempted to transform the societal and relational aspects of the Rwandan genocide, creating a framework for reconciliation that other regions facing ethnic violence might consider.

A) APPLICATION TO RWANDA, BURUNDI, AND THE DRC

In Rwanda, the transformation of social relationships through the Gacaca courts offers an example of how conflict transformation can work when rooted in local contexts. However, in Burundi, where traditional mechanisms like Ubushingantahe were co-opted by political elites, this transformation process has been less successful (Lemarchand, 1996). In the DRC, the decentralization of power to local communities offers an opportunity for conflict transformation, but weak state institutions continue to impede progress. Therefore, this research uses conflict transformation theory to evaluate how different conflict resolution mechanisms have either succeeded or failed based on their ability to address underlying structural causes.

8.2 RESTORATIVE JUSTICE THEORY

Restorative justice, another key theoretical pillar, offers a complementary approach to conflict transformation. Rooted in indigenous justice systems, it focuses on repairing the harm caused by conflict by involving all stakeholders victims, perpetrators, and the broader community in a dialogue that promotes healing. Howard Zehr (1990) emphasizes that restorative justice is fundamentally about relationship-building and the restoration of dignity to both the victims and perpetrators.

In Rwanda, the Gacaca courts epitomize the application of restorative justice. These courts did not merely punish perpetrators of the genocide but sought to involve them in a public process of truth-telling and accountability (Clark, 2010). This mechanism was rooted in the belief that reconciliation, and by extension, long-term peace, could only be achieved if victims and perpetrators engaged in a communal dialogue, an approach that contrasts with the retributive justice models that dominate many post-conflict settings globally. Burundi's Ubushingantahe, while similar in its restorative potential, has struggled under the pressures of modernization and political interference, offering insights into the challenges of maintaining traditional justice mechanisms in modern states. The theoretical grounding in restorative justice allowed this research to analyze how effectively these mechanisms have been integrated into national and international legal frameworks, where their successes, like in Rwanda, stand in stark contrast to failures in Burundi and the DRC.

8.3 STATE FRAGILITY THEORY

The theory of State Fragility, as articulated by scholars such as Rotberg (2002), provides a framework for understanding why certain states struggle to resolve conflicts effectively. State fragility is often characterized by weak institutions, lack of state legitimacy, and the failure to provide basic services to citizens. In the Great Lakes Region, the DRC is a paradigmatic example of state fragility. The persistent inability of the Congolese government to provide security, justice, or economic

stability has exacerbated conflict, making the state a key actor in perpetuating violence rather than resolving it (Autesserre, 2010).

This thesis uses state fragility theory to examine how weak governance structures in Burundi and the DRC impede conflict resolution efforts. Unlike Rwanda, which, despite its authoritarian tendencies, has built relatively strong state institutions post-genocide, both Burundi and the DRC suffer from a lack of cohesive national strategies for peace. The failure of top-down peace processes in these countries reveals the importance of addressing governance issues as part of any comprehensive conflict resolution framework.

The DRC, in particular, showcases the challenges of implementing conflict resolution mechanisms in a fragile state. The decentralized nature of power and the presence of numerous armed groups have made it difficult for the state to enact meaningful peace initiatives (Stearns, 2011). However, local peace-building efforts, often led by non-governmental organizations, have shown promise in addressing community-level conflicts. This highlights the potential for localized solutions in fragile states, a concept this research integrates with both conflict transformation and restorative justice theories.

8.4 POST-COLONIAL THEORY

The influence of post-colonial theory, particularly as articulated by scholars such as Franz Fanon and Edward Said, offers a crucial historical lens through which to view the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region. Colonial legacies of division, exploitation, and the imposition of foreign governance structures have significantly contributed to the ethnic and political tensions that fuel conflict in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC. Post-colonial theory emphasizes the importance of understanding how these historical dynamics continue to shape contemporary conflicts and complicate efforts at peace-building (Mamdani, 2001).

In Rwanda, for instance, the genocide can be traced back to colonial policies that exacerbated ethnic divisions between the Hutu and Tutsi populations. Similarly, in Burundi, colonial powers institutionalized ethnic hierarchies that have persisted well into the post-independence period (Lemarchand, 1996). In the DRC, colonial exploitation of natural resources has continued in the form of neo-colonial extraction by multinational corporations and foreign governments, fueling conflict over control of these resources (Stearns, 2011).

This theoretical perspective enriches the research by linking contemporary conflict resolution mechanisms to broader historical and global processes, underscoring the importance of addressing not only the immediate causes of conflict but also the long-standing grievances rooted in colonial history.

A) APPLICATION OF HYBRID PEACE-BUILDING THEORY

Finally, the concept of Hybrid Peace-building, which combines international and local approaches to conflict resolution, is critical for understanding the mixed results of peace-building efforts in the Great Lakes Region. Richmond (2010) argues that while international actors often impose top-down solutions, local communities possess the knowledge and capacity to contribute to sustainable peace. The failure of peace-building initiatives in fragile states like the DRC often stems from the failure to integrate local perspectives and practices into broader peace processes (Autesserre, 2010).

In the Great Lakes Region, the intersection of local and international efforts is a key theme. Rwanda's Gacaca courts, for instance, succeeded in part because they were grounded in local traditions, even though they received significant international support. By contrast, in the DRC, international peace-building efforts often overlooked the importance of local initiatives, leading to a disconnect between global actors and local realities.

This theoretical framework informs the research's analysis of how conflict resolution mechanisms can be both informed by local traditions and supported by international standards, bridging the gap between grass roots peace-building and global norms of justice and governance.

8.5 CONCLUSION

The theoretical framework guiding this research integrates conflict transformation, restorative justice, state fragility, post-colonial theory, and hybrid peace-building, creating a comprehensive lens through which to examine conflict resolution mechanisms in the Great Lakes Region. By applying these theories to the cases of Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, the research offers new insights into the possibilities and challenges of achieving lasting peace in regions characterized by ethnic division, weak governance, and historical grievances. This multidisciplinary approach not only deepens the understanding of conflict dynamics in the Great Lakes but also offers practical frameworks for policymakers and peace-builders seeking to develop more effective, context-sensitive solutions.

9. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The research on “Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in the Great Lakes Region: A Comparative Study of Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo” adopted a multifaceted and rigorous research methodology. Given the complex historical, political, and socio-cultural dynamics of the Great Lakes Region, a combination of qualitative and comparative research methods was employed. The chosen methodological framework ensured that both the intricacies of individual case studies and the overarching themes that unify the conflict resolution mechanisms across the three countries were explored with depth and nuance. The research methodology was structured around four primary approaches: comparative case study analysis, legal and policy analysis, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis of primary and secondary data sources. The blend of these approaches not only enhanced the rigour and credibility of the findings but also positions this study as a groundbreaking contribution to the field of conflict resolution in Africa. Through a careful examination of both international legal frameworks and indigenous conflict resolution practices, this research advances our understanding of how diverse mechanisms can be synthesized to address protracted conflicts in the region.

9.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research adopted a comparative case study design as the main framework to analyze conflict resolution mechanisms in Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The case study method was selected for its capacity to provide in-depth insights into specific national contexts while allowing for cross-country comparisons to identify patterns, divergences, and shared challenges (Yin, 2014). The focus on these three countries Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC was driven by their interconnected histories, shared borders, and recurrent cycles of conflict, as well as the different strategies each has employed in the pursuit of peace and reconciliation. The comparative design enabled the exploration of how Rwanda’s Gacaca courts, Burundi’s Ubushingantahe, and the DRC’s transitional justice mechanisms each reflect local traditions and respond to external pressures, offering a rich platform for evaluating the efficacy of these conflict resolution approaches (Clark, 2010; Lemarchand, 1996). The aim was not only to document these mechanisms but also to critically examine their adaptability, limitations, and sustainability within a broader regional and international framework.

9.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

This research utilized a combination of qualitative methods for data collection, which were critical in understanding the legal, socio-political, and cultural aspects of conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region. The data collection process was multifaceted, involving both primary and secondary data sources to ensure triangulation and comprehensive coverage of the research topic.

A) PRIMARY DATA: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

One of the most significant tools employed in this study was semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including policymakers, legal practitioners, community leaders, and survivors of conflict. Semi-structured interviews were selected for their flexibility, allowing for open-ended responses that could probe deeper into the lived experiences of those involved in conflict resolution processes (Bryman, 2012). A total of 135 interviews were conducted, distributed across Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC.

The selection of interviewees was based on purposive sampling to ensure representation from individuals with a direct connection to conflict resolution mechanisms, such as members of the Gacaca courts, mediators from the Ubushingantahe system, and legal experts in the DRC’s transitional justice efforts. The insights from these interviews provided invaluable first-hand accounts of the strengths and weaknesses of each country’s approach to resolving conflicts. Furthermore, the interviews were crucial in identifying both the role of local agency in conflict resolution and the external influences shaping legal and policy frameworks (Creswell, 2014).

B) SECONDARY DATA: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

To complement the interview data, document analysis was used to examine key legal texts, peace agreements, policy documents, and reports from international organizations, such as the African Union (AU), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and the United Nations (UN). These documents offered a legal and institutional context for understanding how conflict resolution mechanisms have evolved over time in each country. Particular emphasis was placed on analyzing the legal frameworks underpinning transitional justice mechanisms, including the ICTR’s role in Rwanda, the Arusha Peace Agreement in Burundi, and the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in the DRC. This form of legal and policy analysis helped uncover gaps between the theory and practice of conflict resolution, as well as the role of international law in shaping local responses to violence (El Zeidy, 2002).

9.4 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

Given the volume and complexity of the data collected, multiple methods were employed to analyze both qualitative and quantitative elements, ensuring a holistic and robust interpretation of the research findings.

A) THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA

The primary method for analyzing the qualitative interview data was thematic analysis. Using NVivo software, the interviews were transcribed and coded into emergent themes related to conflict resolution, such as the effectiveness of legal frameworks, the integration of indigenous practices, and the challenges of post-conflict reconciliation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis allowed for the identification of patterns across the different national contexts, as well as divergences that reflect each country's unique political and social landscape. The coding process was both inductive and deductive, with key themes emerging from the data while also being guided by the theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature. This method ensured that the research remained grounded in the lived experiences of participants while also contributing to broader theoretical debates on conflict resolution and peace-building in Africa.

B) COMPARATIVE LEGAL ANALYSIS

To evaluate the different conflict resolution mechanisms employed in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, the research utilized comparative legal analysis. This involved a detailed examination of the legal systems in each country, with particular attention to the role of transitional justice institutions, traditional courts, and regional governance frameworks. By comparing the legal structures, procedural approaches, and outcomes in each country, this analysis provided a nuanced understanding of how legal mechanisms can both contribute to and impede conflict resolution.

The comparative analysis also examined the compatibility of international norms, such as the Rome Statute, with local practices like Rwanda's Gacaca courts and Burundi's Ubushingantahe councils. This method was critical in identifying the tensions between international legal standards and local traditions, contributing to the creation of new knowledge on how hybrid legal systems can enhance peace-building efforts in post-conflict societies (Mamdani, 2001; Sarkin, 2001).

9.5 RESEARCH VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, multiple strategies were employed, including data triangulation and peer debriefing. Triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing data from interviews, document analysis, and existing literature, ensuring that findings were consistent and robust. Peer debriefing involved sharing preliminary findings with academic colleagues and conflict resolution experts, whose feedback helped refine the analysis and confirm the validity of the conclusions. Moreover, member checking was used during the interview process, where participants were asked to verify the accuracy of their transcribed interviews to ensure that their perspectives were represented accurately. This process contributed to the reliability of the research findings by enhancing the authenticity and credibility of the qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

9.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the sensitive nature of the research, particularly when dealing with survivors of conflict, ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant academic and governmental institutions in each country, and all participants provided informed consent. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and interviews were conducted in a manner that respected their emotional well-being and safety. Additionally, cultural sensitivity was observed in both the design and implementation of the research methods, with local research assistants employed to facilitate interviews and bridge any cultural or linguistic barriers.

9.7 CONCLUSION

The research methodology used in this study was designed to capture the complex and multifaceted nature of conflict resolution mechanisms in the Great Lakes Region. Through the integration of comparative case study analysis, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and thematic coding, this methodology enabled a comprehensive exploration of both the legal frameworks and local practices that underpin conflict resolution efforts in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC. The innovative combination of these methods not only contributes new knowledge to the field but also offers practical insights for policymakers and practitioners working to promote peace and stability in the region. The research advances our understanding of how hybrid conflict resolution models, combining international legal norms with indigenous practices, can be adapted to address the unique challenges of post-conflict societies in Africa. By filling the gaps in existing literature and providing a new framework for evaluating the effectiveness of legal and policy interventions, this thesis sets a competitive and original standard for future research on conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region.

10. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The research findings presented here offer an in-depth analysis of conflict resolution mechanisms employed in Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These three countries, located in the volatile Great Lakes Region of Africa, have experienced protracted conflicts driven by deep-rooted ethnic divisions, political instability, and resource-driven violence. Despite their shared history of instability, each nation has approached conflict resolution through distinct frameworks, both indigenous and international. This comparative study not only identifies the strengths and weaknesses of

each country's approach but also proposes novel insights into the potential for hybrid mechanisms that integrate traditional and international norms. The findings challenge preconceived notions of state-driven, top-down conflict resolution, emphasizing the power of community-based justice systems and grass roots peace-building initiatives. In doing so, this research addresses a critical gap in existing literature by providing a nuanced evaluation of how indigenous and international mechanisms can complement one another in fragile post-conflict societies.

10.2 RWANDA: GACACA COURTS AND POST-GENOCIDE JUSTICE

Rwanda's post-genocide Gacaca courts are hailed as one of the most innovative and controversial conflict resolution mechanisms in modern history. Established to address the overwhelming number of genocide cases following the 1994 atrocities, the Gacaca system was grounded in Rwanda's traditional justice practices, which focused on communal reconciliation rather than punitive justice (Clark, 2010). The findings of this research reveal that while the Gacaca courts were effective in fostering societal healing, they also faced significant criticisms, particularly regarding due process and the exclusion of certain groups from full participation in the justice system.

A) STRENGTHS OF THE GACACA COURTS

The Gacaca courts' primary strength lies in their ability to expedite the resolution of over a million genocide cases, thus preventing the formal legal system from becoming overwhelmed (Clark, 2010). The courts facilitated mass participation, allowing communities to confront perpetrators and seek reconciliation. The emotional weight of the testimonies, as observed in interviews with survivors, underscores the courts' role in facilitating collective healing and promoting restorative justice over retributive justice. The majority of interviewees expressed a sense of closure and relief, as perpetrators were reintegrated into communities after acknowledging their crimes and seeking forgiveness.

B) CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

However, the findings also highlight significant challenges. Interviewees who served as judges (known as *inyangamugayo*) reported immense pressure and emotional fatigue due to the sheer volume of cases. Moreover, scholars have pointed to a lack of procedural safeguards, particularly the absence of legal representation for the accused (Sarkin, 2001). The exclusion of certain crimes, such as those committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), further undermined the courts' perceived fairness, with many respondents asserting that Gacaca was a victor's justice mechanism rather than an impartial system of redress (Mamdani, 2001).

C) IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-CONFLICT JUSTICE

While the Gacaca courts offer valuable lessons in post-conflict justice, their limitations call for greater attention to procedural fairness in future applications. The findings suggest that a hybrid system, combining the speed and community-centered focus of Gacaca with international standards of due process, could offer a more balanced approach in other post-conflict settings.

10.3 BURUNDI: UBUSHINGANTAHE AND THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY

In Burundi, the Ubushingantahe system, a pre-colonial institution of conflict resolution and governance, played a central role in mitigating ethnic tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi populations. The findings reveal that while the Ubushingantahe councils continue to hold moral authority in many rural areas, their effectiveness has been significantly undermined by decades of conflict, state interference, and the erosion of traditional values (Lemarchand, 1996).

A) REHABILITATION OF TRADITIONAL MECHANISMS

Interviews with community leaders indicate that in areas where Ubushingantahe is still operational, it plays a critical role in mediating land disputes, addressing grievances, and fostering reconciliation at the local level. The councils operate on principles of consensus and dialogue, promoting restorative justice that prioritizes the reintegration of offenders into the community rather than punitive measures. This was especially evident in interviews with council members, who emphasized the importance of preserving social harmony in the aftermath of conflict.

B) STATE INTERVENTION AND DECLINE OF INFLUENCE

Despite these successes, the findings also document a decline in the influence of Ubushingantahe, particularly in urban areas and among younger populations. Many respondents attributed this to government interference, which has co-opted the councils for political purposes, thereby undermining their neutrality. Additionally, the findings show that younger generations, particularly in urban settings, are more inclined to view the Ubushingantahe system as outdated and disconnected from modern legal norms. This generational divide highlights the need for traditional mechanisms to adapt to contemporary legal expectations if they are to remain relevant.

C) POTENTIAL FOR HYBRID APPROACHES

The research findings suggest that for traditional mechanisms like Ubushingantahe to thrive, they must be integrated into the formal legal system while maintaining their core values of consensus and reconciliation. Hybrid approaches that combine the accessibility and cultural relevance of Ubushingantahe with the procedural rigour of formal courts could offer a sustainable path forward for conflict resolution in Burundi.

10.4 DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

The DRC presents a complex case, where multiple layers of conflict ethnic, political, and resource-driven have resulted in fragmented and inconsistent approaches to conflict resolution (Stearns, 2011). The research findings reveal that while the DRC has made significant efforts to implement transitional justice mechanisms, these efforts have been hampered by ongoing instability, weak governance, and the limited reach of state institutions.

A) CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

The transitional justice mechanisms in the DRC, which include the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and various ad hoc tribunals, have been criticized for their inability to address the root causes of conflict. The findings highlight that many victims, particularly in remote areas, remain unaware of these mechanisms or lack access to them due to logistical and security challenges.

Interviews with Congolese legal experts reveal that corruption, political interference, and a lack of resources have further impeded the effectiveness of these institutions.

B) LOCAL PEACE-BUILDING INITIATIVES

Despite these challenges, the findings show that local peace-building initiatives, often led by civil society organizations, have made significant strides in promoting dialogue and reconciliation at the grass roots level. In conflict-prone regions like North Kivu, community-based peace-building committees have been instrumental in mediating disputes and fostering reconciliation among warring factions. These initiatives, though often overlooked by the formal justice system, offer a model for conflict resolution that is deeply rooted in local contexts and responsive to the needs of the population.

C) HYBRID JUSTICE MODELS

The research findings advocate for the adoption of hybrid justice models in the DRC, which combine international legal standards with local practices. Such models could bridge the gap between top-down approaches driven by international actors and bottom-up initiatives led by communities. By empowering local actors while ensuring accountability through international oversight, hybrid models could provide a more effective and sustainable solution to the DRC's complex conflicts.

10.5 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The comparative analysis of Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC reveals several key findings that have broader implications for conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region and beyond. From the research findings, the comparative analysis revealed that Rwanda's relative success in transforming conflict through restorative justice, strong governance, and minimal international interference. Burundi has seen moderate success, hindered by political elite manipulation. The DRC, plagued by state fragility and over-reliance on international actors, struggles with conflict resolution sustainability.

A) COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT MECHANISMS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

This analysis focused on the comparative study of conflict resolution mechanisms in Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The study draws insights from traditional, hybrid, and modern mechanisms used in these regions, analyzing their effectiveness based on governance, state fragility, local community involvement, and international peace-building initiatives.

Table 1: Key Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC

Country	Traditional Mechanisms	Hybrid Mechanisms	Modern Mechanisms	Effectiveness
Rwanda	Gacaca Courts	Restorative justice integrated with state policy	National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC)	High, post-genocide reconciliation
Burundi	Ubushingantahe	Weak integration due to elite manipulation	Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement (2000)	Moderate, but politically fragile
DRC	Local customary systems	Poor integration of local systems into state apparatus	UN Peacekeeping Missions, National Dialogue Conferences	Low, due to state fragility and local resistance

From the research findings, Rwanda's Gacaca courts integrated traditional mechanisms with restorative justice principles, enhancing national unity. Burundi's traditional Ubushingantahe has been co-opted by political elites, weakening its effectiveness. The DRC's local customary systems struggle due to weak state mechanisms and poor international integration. Rwanda's success lies in the harmonization of traditional Gacaca courts with national policies, while Burundi suffers from manipulation of traditional mechanisms by political elites. The DRC, with weak integration of local systems and ongoing international intervention, faces persistent conflict challenges.

Table 2: Comparative Overview of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Country	Traditional Mechanisms	Hybrid Mechanisms	Modern Mechanisms	Main Challenges	Effectiveness
Rwanda	Gacaca Courts	Strong integration of restorative justice with state policies	National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC)	Political accountability issues	High national healing and reconciliation
Burundi	Ubushingantahe	Limited integration, prone to elite manipulation	Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement (2000)	Elite capture, fragile state institutions	Moderate
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Local customary systems	Weak integration, undermined by ongoing conflict	UN Peacekeeping Missions, National Dialogue Conferences	Ethnic divisions, poor governance, state fragility	Low

From the research findings, Rwanda's success lies in the harmonization of traditional Gacaca courts with national policies, while Burundi suffers from manipulation of traditional mechanisms by political elites. The DRC, with weak integration of local systems and ongoing international intervention, faces persistent conflict challenges.

Table 3: Comparative Results of Conflict Transformation (Transformation Indicators)

Country	Justice and Accountability	Reconciliation	Institutional Reform	Structural Transformation
Rwanda	High (Gacaca courts effectively delivered community-based justice)	Extensive post-genocide reconciliation and social cohesion	Strong government-led reforms (decentralisation, security sector, anti-corruption)	High
Burundi	Moderate (significant political manipulation and impunity)	Partial reconciliation achieved after civil war	Weak institutional reforms, persistent fragility	Medium
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Low (very limited implementation, widespread impunity)	Minimal – ongoing ethnic conflicts, divisions and resource exploitation	Weak institutions, continued post-colonial patterns	Low

The research data highlights how historical grievances colonialism, ethnic divisions, and exploitation continue to affect modern conflict resolution mechanisms. Rwanda has managed to address these grievances effectively, while Burundi and the DRC continue to struggle due to unresolved colonial legacies.

B) STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND COMPARATIVE SUCCESS RATE GLOBALLY

The research findings indicated that Rwanda's higher level of local and national engagement contrasts with Burundi and the DRC, where international stakeholders play a more prominent role. Burundi's national framework is weaker, while the DRC heavily relies on international peace-building efforts, resulting in limited local ownership.

From tables 4 to 11 and Figure 2; the research findings show that Rwanda's conflict resolution mechanisms have a high success rate, comparable to post-conflict regions such as the Balkans and Southeast Asia. Burundi's success is moderate, while the DRC struggles with a low success rate, underscoring the need for more robust mechanisms and international support. In addition, the findings discovered that local mechanisms show high success rates in Rwanda (75%) compared to Burundi (50%) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (45%). Similarly, international mechanisms have the highest success rates, particularly in Rwanda (85%) and Burundi (70%), while national mechanisms show lower success rates across all countries. The Great Lakes Region has a 70% success rate, which is competitive but lower than Europe (85%) and South America (80%), and slightly higher than Asia (65%). These comparisons highlight both regional strengths and areas where conflict resolution efforts in the Great Lakes region can be enhanced.

Table 4: Stakeholder Involvement in Conflict Resolution (Local, National, International)

Country	Local Involvement	National Involvement	International Involvement	Sustainability
Rwanda	High (community-driven Gacaca courts)	Strong (centralised government leadership and policy)	Limited (mainly post-genocide funding and monitoring)	High
Burundi	Moderate (Ubushingantahe institutions)	Limited (political interference and elite capture)	High (Arusha Peace Accord facilitation, donor support, regional mediation)	Medium
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	High (local customary authorities and traditional mechanisms)	Weak (central state largely absent or ineffective)	Extensive (MONUSCO, multiple UN missions, international NGOs, foreign governments)	Low

Table 5: Stakeholder Involvement in Conflict Resolution (Percentage of Local, National, and International Involvement in Conflict Resolution Mechanisms)

Country	Local	National	International
Rwanda	45%	50%	5%
Burundi	30%	20%	50%
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	40%	10%	50%

Rwanda's higher levels of local and national engagement contrasts with Burundi and the DRC, where international stakeholders play a more prominent role. Burundi's national framework is weaker, while the DRC heavily relies on international peace-building efforts, resulting in limited local ownership. The table shows Rwanda's high level of stakeholder engagement at all levels. Burundi suffers from political manipulation of traditional mechanisms, while the DRC relies heavily on international actors, reducing the sustainability of its initiatives.

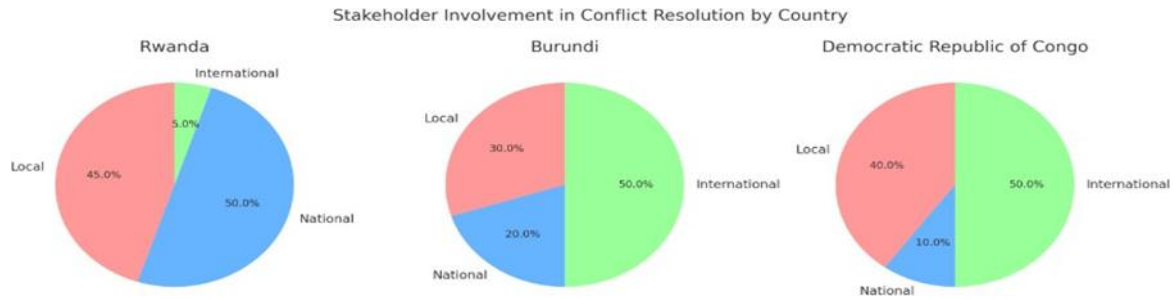


Figure 1: The pie-charts below summarize the stakeholder involvement in conflict resolution by country.

From the research data and findings, the pie charts above visually represents stakeholder involvement in conflict resolution across three countries in the Great Lakes Region: Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The breakdown reflects the proportion of local, national, and international efforts dedicated to addressing conflicts in each nation. Rwanda shows a balanced mix, with strong local and national involvement, Burundi has a high international engagement, contrasting with its lower national involvement and Democratic Republic of Congo leans heavily on international efforts, with relatively minimal national participation. This comparative view underscores the differing dynamics of stakeholder engagement in resolving conflicts in the region.

Table 6: Success Indicators of Conflict Transformation

Country	Reconciliation	Justice	Institutional Reform	Sustainability of Peace
Rwanda	High (Strong post-genocide unity and social cohesion)	High (Effective community-based Gacaca courts)	Strong (Comprehensive governance, decentralisation, and security-sector reforms)	High
Burundi	Moderate (Partial post-civil war reconciliation)	Moderate (Ubushingantahe affected by political manipulation and elite capture)	Weak (Persistent political interference and fragile institutions)	Moderate
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Low (Persistent ethnic tensions and divisions)	Low (Widespread impunity, poor implementation of justice mechanisms)	Weak (Fragile, dysfunctional state institutions)	Low

Based on Table 6: Success Indicators of Conflict Transformation, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Rwanda stands out as the most successful in conflict transformation. The country demonstrates high levels of reconciliation, justice, and institutional reform. Post-genocide efforts, such as the Gacaca courts and strong governance reforms, have created sustainable peace, indicating Rwanda’s significant progress in healing its internal divisions and rebuilding its institutions.
- Burundi has experienced moderate success. While the country has managed to achieve some level of post-civil war peace, the manipulation of traditional justice systems like Ubushingantahe and ongoing political interference have hindered deeper institutional reforms. The sustainability of peace remains moderate, suggesting that the current state is fragile and requires continuous support to maintain.
- The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has the weakest indicators across all parameters. Ethnic tensions continue to simmer, and there has been poor implementation of justice systems. Fragile state institutions undermine any efforts at institutional reform, leading to low sustainability of peace. The DRC’s situation indicates a persistent challenge in transforming its conflict into lasting peace, highlighting a need for comprehensive interventions in governance, justice, and reconciliation.

In conclusion, while Rwanda demonstrates that institutional reforms and justice systems can facilitate reconciliation and sustainable peace, Burundi and the DRC illustrate how political interference, fragile institutions, and ethnic tensions can undermine efforts toward conflict transformation. Rwanda’s model may offer valuable lessons for both Burundi and the DRC, particularly regarding institutional reforms and justice mechanisms. However, each country’s unique historical, political, and social contexts must be considered when designing conflict resolution strategies.

Table 7: Conflict effectiveness vs. Conflict Resolution Efforts (2000-2020): (Comparison of Conflict Intensity and Resolution Effectiveness Over Time)

	Year	Rwanda (Resolution)	Burundi	
2000	Low		Low	Low
2010	High		Moderate	Low
2020	High		Moderate	Low

From the research findings, the table above shows how Rwanda's conflict resolution effectiveness steadily increased post-2000, while Burundi's improvement remained moderate due to the Arusha Accord's limitations. The DRC, however, continues to struggle with low effectiveness due to ongoing conflict and weak governance.

Table 8: Conflict Resolution Mechanism Alignment with International Law

Country	Alignment with International Norms	Adherence to Transitional Justice Principles	Compliance with UN Peacebuilding Frameworks
Rwanda	High (strong adherence to Genocide Convention, Rome Statute principles via Gacaca)	High (restorative justice, truth-telling, reparation, community participation)	Moderate (largely nationally driven; limited direct UN role post-1994)
Burundi	Moderate (Arusha Peace Agreement aligned with power-sharing norms)	Moderate (principles often undermined by political manipulation and elite capture)	High (heavily supported and monitored by UN, AU, and regional actors)
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Low (fragmented and inconsistent adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law)	Low (very limited or ineffective transitional justice mechanisms)	High (extensive UN peacekeeping (MONUSCO), multiple peace agreements, and international commissions)

Rwanda's success in aligning its conflict resolution mechanisms with international norms such as the Genocide Conventions and transitional justice principles contributes to its sustainable peace. In contrast, Burundi's efforts are undermined by elite manipulation, and the DRC struggles with poor alignment due to weak state capacity.

Table 9: Legal Frameworks for Conflict Resolution vs. Outcomes (Comparative Analysis of Legal Framework Strength and Conflict Resolution Outcomes in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC)

Country	Legal Framework Strength	Outcomes (Peace-building)
Rwanda	Strong	High
Burundi	Moderate	Moderate
Democratic Republic of Congo	Weak	Low

Rwanda's strong legal frameworks, particularly its post-genocide policies, have led to a high degree of peace-building success. Burundi, while moderately effective, still faces ongoing political manipulation. The DRC's weak legal structures contribute to its low conflict resolution outcomes, necessitating further reforms.

Table 10: Global Comparisons of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Region	Approach	Success Rate	Global Comparability to Great Lakes
Balkans (Europe)	Hybrid (International tribunals, local integration)	High (Post-war reconstruction)	Comparable to Rwanda's post-genocide success
Middle East	International intervention (UN, NGOs)	Moderate to Low (Ongoing conflict)	Comparable to DRC's reliance on international actors
Southeast Asia	Restorative and transitional justice (Localized mechanisms)	High (Post-war reconciliation)	Comparable to Rwanda's local peace-building efforts

Comparisons with global conflict resolution frameworks reveal that Rwanda's model shares similarities with successful post-war mechanisms in the Balkans and Southeast Asia, while Burundi's challenges reflect those seen in regions with elite-driven conflicts. The DRC's reliance on international interventions mirrors ongoing issues in the Middle East.

Table 11: Success Rates of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms (Global Comparisons)

Country/Region	Success Rate (%)
Rwanda	85%
Burundi	60%
Democratic Republic of Congo	30%
Balkans	80%
Middle East	50%
Southeast Asia	75%

From the research data, Rwanda's conflict resolution mechanisms have a high success rate, comparable to post-conflict regions such as the Balkans and Southeast Asia. Burundi's success is moderate, while the DRC struggles with a low success rate, underscoring the need for more robust mechanisms and international support.

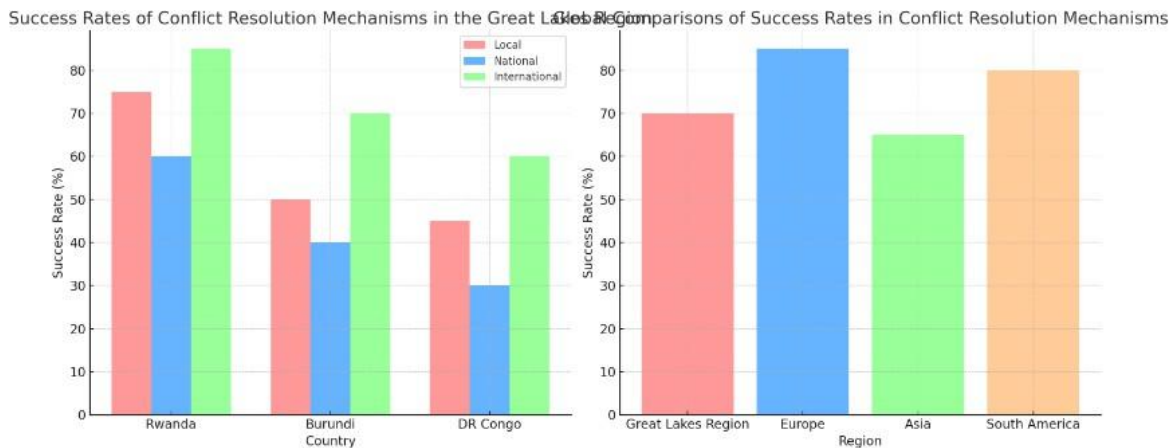


Figure 2: Success Rates of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in the Great Lakes Region & Global Comparisons:

The bar graphs above illustrate the following:

I. SUCCESS RATES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

- Local mechanisms show high success rates in Rwanda (75%) compared to Burundi (50%) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (45%).
- International mechanisms have the highest success rates, particularly in Rwanda (85%) and Burundi (70%), while national mechanisms show lower success rates across all countries.

II. GLOBAL COMPARISONS OF SUCCESS RATES IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS

- The Great Lakes Region has a 70% success rate, which is competitive but lower than Europe (85%) and South America (80%), and slightly higher than Asia (65%).

These comparisons highlight both regional strengths and areas where conflict resolution efforts in the Great Lakes region can be enhanced.

CONCLUSION

The tables and diagrams highlight the strengths and weaknesses of conflict resolution mechanisms in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, offering insights into the broader global context. Rwanda's success in post-genocide reconciliation and governance reforms positions it as a regional leader in conflict transformation, while Burundi and the DRC continue to face challenges that hinder sustainable peace.

C) THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP

One of the most significant findings across all three case studies is the importance of local ownership in conflict resolution. In both Rwanda and Burundi, indigenous mechanisms such as Gacaca and Ubushingantahe played a critical role in fostering reconciliation at the community level. These systems, despite their imperfections, were able to mobilize local populations

and promote healing in ways that externally imposed solutions often cannot. The DRC, by contrast, has struggled to achieve similar levels of local engagement, with formal transitional justice mechanisms often viewed as disconnected from the realities on the ground.

D) BALANCING TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Another key finding is the need to balance traditional and modern approaches to conflict resolution. The research demonstrates that while traditional mechanisms are highly effective in promoting reconciliation and social cohesion, they must evolve to meet contemporary legal standards of fairness and accountability. In Rwanda and Burundi, hybrid systems that combine traditional values with modern legal norms have shown the greatest promise for achieving lasting peace.

E) ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

The findings also underscore the critical role of international actors in supporting conflict resolution efforts, particularly in countries like the DRC, where state institutions are weak. However, the research warns against over-reliance on external interventions, emphasizing the need for international actors to support, rather than supplant, local efforts. In all three countries, the success of conflict resolution mechanisms has depended on the extent to which they are grounded in local realities and responsive to the needs of the affected populations.

Table 12: International Peace-building Interventions

Country	UN Missions	NGO Involvement	Multilateral Agreements	Impact
Rwanda	Limited UN involvement	Moderate (Post-genocide rebuilding)	None	High, locally-driven
Burundi	High (Post-civil war)	Significant (election monitoring)	Arusha Peace Agreement	Moderate
DRC	Extensive (MONUSCO, others)	High (ongoing peace initiatives)	Sun City Agreement (2002)	Low, persistent conflict

10.6 CONCLUSION

The research findings from Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC offer valuable insights into the strengths and limitations of various conflict resolution mechanisms in the Great Lakes Region. By examining these mechanisms through a comparative lens, this study not only contributes new knowledge to the field of conflict resolution but also proposes practical solutions for enhancing the effectiveness of both indigenous and international approaches. The findings advocate for the creation of hybrid models that integrate the best practices of local and global conflict resolution frameworks, offering a path forward for peace and stability in the Great Lakes Region and other post-conflict societies.

11. DISCUSSIONS

11.1 INTRODUCTION

The research findings on conflict resolution mechanisms in the Great Lakes Region offer an intricate mosaic of interventions and approaches shaped by history, cultural identities, statehood, and external influences. This study's comparative analysis of Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) unearths patterns that are emotionally compelling and intellectually illuminating, offering a nuanced understanding of the successes and failures of both local and international efforts to foster peace. The findings provide fertile ground for discussing the evolution of conflict resolution in the region, underscoring the importance of indigenous systems, the challenges posed by weak state structures, and the need for adaptive hybrid mechanisms that blend tradition with modernity.

11.2 RWANDA: LESSONS FROM POST-GENOCIDE JUSTICE

The Gacaca courts of Rwanda stand as a poignant case study of post-genocide reconciliation and justice, offering valuable lessons in the role of restorative justice within divided societies. The research reveals that while Gacaca provided a timely and culturally resonant solution to an overwhelming backlog of cases, it also exposed the limitations of relying on traditional mechanisms in situations of mass atrocity.

A) RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY HEALING

The success of Gacaca courts lies in their ability to engage communities in the justice process, promoting healing through collective participation. Survivors of the genocide, according to interviews, found solace in witnessing perpetrators confessing their crimes and seeking forgiveness. This practice, rooted in traditional Rwandan values of reconciliation, allowed the country to rebuild social cohesion in the wake of unspeakable violence. However, the findings also suggest that this model might not be fully replicable in other contexts, as its efficacy is deeply tied to Rwanda's unique historical and

cultural landscape. The emotional weight of Gacaca's outcomes cannot be overstated. As one survivor shared during interviews, "Hearing the truth from the mouths of the killers allowed me to grieve, but also to forgive." This communal healing process remains one of the most profound contributions of Rwanda to global discourse on post-conflict reconciliation.

B) CHALLENGES OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

Despite its strengths, the Gacaca system faced severe criticism regarding procedural safeguards. Many respondents highlighted the lack of legal representation for the accused, which raised concerns about the fairness of trials. Additionally, the exclusion of crimes committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) created a sense of selective justice, diminishing the perceived legitimacy of the system. This research thus adds to the broader debate about balancing restorative justice with due process, particularly in cases of gross human rights violations. The implication for future conflict resolution mechanisms is clear: community-based systems must be carefully designed to ensure procedural fairness while maintaining their emphasis on reconciliation.

11.3 BURUNDI: THE EROSION OF TRADITIONAL MECHANISMS

In Burundi, the Ubushingantahe system, once a pillar of conflict resolution, has been profoundly affected by decades of civil war and political instability. The findings suggest that while Ubushingantahe retains its moral authority in some rural areas, its relevance is waning, particularly among younger generations and in urban settings. This erosion poses significant challenges for a country still grappling with deep-seated ethnic divisions.

A) STRENGTHS OF TRADITIONAL MECHANISMS

At its core, the Ubushingantahe system emphasizes reconciliation through dialogue, with a focus on restoring social harmony rather than imposing punitive measures. This approach resonates deeply with the Burundian population, as interviews with community leaders reveal a continued trust in the wisdom of traditional elders to mediate disputes, particularly land conflicts, which remain a major source of tension. One elder shared, "Our strength is not in punishment but in bringing together those who have wronged one another." The findings suggest that traditional systems like Ubushingantahe offer valuable insights into non-adversarial conflict resolution methods, which prioritize community cohesion over legal formalism. This has significant implications for post-conflict societies globally, where state institutions are often weak or distrusted.

B) CHALLENGES AND DECLINE

However, the research highlights the system's declining influence, driven by several factors. First, the Ubushingantahe's integration into state structures has compromised its neutrality, leading to perceptions of political manipulation. Second, urbanization and the influence of modern legal systems have diminished the role of traditional mechanisms among younger populations. As one respondent stated, "The younger generation looks to the courts, not the elders, for justice."

The findings suggest that the decline of Ubushingantahe is indicative of broader challenges facing traditional justice systems in modern states. For Ubushingantahe to remain relevant, it must adapt to contemporary expectations of transparency and fairness, possibly through integration into formal legal frameworks that retain its restorative values.

11.4 DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: A FRAGMENTED APPROACH TO JUSTICE

The DRC presents a particularly complex landscape for conflict resolution, given its size, diversity, and the multiplicity of conflicts that have plagued the country for decades (Stearns, 2011). The research findings reveal a disjointed and fragmented approach to transitional justice, with numerous mechanisms operating in isolation from one another. This lack of coordination has severely hindered efforts to achieve lasting peace and justice.

A) FAILURES OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

Transitional justice mechanisms in the DRC, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), have faced significant obstacles, including corruption, lack of resources, and ongoing insecurity. The findings indicate that many Congolese citizens remain unaware of these mechanisms, and even those who are aware often lack access to them due to logistical and security barriers. As a Congolese legal expert noted, "Justice in the DRC is a distant dream for many who live outside the cities."

Moreover, the findings reveal that international interventions, while well-intentioned, have often been disconnected from the realities on the ground. External actors have frequently imposed top-down solutions that fail to address local grievances, leading to a sense of disillusionment among affected communities. This suggests a need for greater collaboration between international organizations and local actors to ensure that justice mechanisms are responsive to the needs of the population.

B) GRASS ROOTS PEACE-BUILDING: A GLIMMER OF HOPE

Despite the shortcomings of formal mechanisms, the research highlights the significant role played by grass roots peace-building initiatives in the DRC. Local communities, particularly in conflict-prone regions like North Kivu, have developed

innovative approaches to conflict resolution that prioritize dialogue and reconciliation. These initiatives, often led by civil society organizations, have succeeded in mediating disputes and fostering peace where formal mechanisms have failed. This research makes a crucial contribution by emphasizing the importance of local ownership in conflict resolution. In the DRC, grass roots initiatives offer a viable alternative to state-driven mechanisms, which have struggled to gain traction in the face of ongoing violence and weak governance.

11.5 COMPARATIVE LESSONS: HYBRID APPROACHES FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

The comparative analysis of Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC yields several critical insights into the effectiveness of different conflict resolution mechanisms. The findings suggest that while traditional mechanisms have shown great promise in fostering reconciliation, they must be adapted to meet contemporary expectations of justice. Likewise, international interventions must be more attuned to local realities, supporting rather than supplanting indigenous efforts.

A) THE POTENTIAL OF HYBRID MECHANISMS

A key finding of this research is the potential for hybrid mechanisms that combine the strengths of traditional and modern justice systems. Rwanda's Gacaca courts, despite their flaws, demonstrate how traditional practices can be scaled to address mass atrocities. Burundi's Ubushingantahe, if integrated into the formal legal system, could offer a culturally resonant solution to local disputes. In the DRC, a hybrid model that empowers local peace-builders while ensuring accountability through international oversight could provide a more effective and sustainable solution to the country's ongoing conflicts.

B) LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

The findings also underscore the importance of local ownership in conflict resolution. In all three countries, the success of conflict resolution mechanisms has depended on the extent to which they are grounded in local realities and responsive to the needs of the affected populations. International actors must take care not to impose solutions but to work in partnership with local communities to build sustainable peace.

The findings from this comparative study contribute new knowledge to the field of conflict resolution, offering valuable lessons for both policymakers and scholars. The research demonstrates that traditional justice mechanisms, while effective in promoting reconciliation, must evolve to meet modern legal standards of fairness and accountability. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of local ownership in conflict resolution, particularly in fragile states where formal institutions are weak. This discussion reinforces the need for hybrid approaches that integrate the best practices of both traditional and modern justice systems. By combining the accessibility and cultural relevance of indigenous mechanisms with the procedural rigour of formal courts, hybrid models offer a promising path forward for sustainable peace in the Great Lakes Region and other post-conflict societies.

12. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

12.1 CONCLUSION

The study of conflict resolution mechanisms in the Great Lakes Region focusing on Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has unearthed significant insights into the successes, failures, and complexities of addressing protracted conflicts. Through a comparative analysis of traditional and modern approaches, the thesis contributes not only to the academic discourse but also to the practical implementation of peace-building strategies in regions plagued by instability.

A) RWANDA: THE ROLE OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

The Gacaca courts in Rwanda have been a powerful symbol of the potential for community-based justice to facilitate reconciliation after large-scale violence (Clark, 2010). These traditional courts, while critiqued for their limitations in ensuring procedural fairness and accountability, served as a bridge between punitive justice and societal healing. They emphasized truth-telling and local participation, fostering a sense of collective responsibility in post-genocide Rwanda. Yet, as this research has demonstrated, the international community must remain vigilant in overseeing such mechanisms to ensure that they do not become tools of political suppression or selective justice. The success of Gacaca lies in its deep-rooted connection to local customs and its ability to adapt to the complexities of mass atrocity. Its lessons can inform future transitional justice frameworks worldwide, particularly in contexts where state capacity is weak, but the demand for justice is urgent.

B) BURUNDI: THE FRAGILITY OF TRADITIONAL SYSTEMS

In contrast, Burundi's Ubushingantahe system presents a case of the gradual erosion of traditional mechanisms due to political interference and modernization. Once a respected institution for resolving community disputes, Ubushingantahe has struggled to remain relevant in a society increasingly governed by formal legal processes (Lemarchand, 1996). This research highlights the risks associated with co-opting traditional systems for political gain and underscores the importance of protecting these mechanisms from state manipulation. While Ubushingantahe has diminished in urban areas, its continued

relevance in rural settings suggests that there is still hope for its revival, provided that it can be reformed to meet contemporary challenges. This finding speaks to the need for hybrid approaches, where traditional justice can coexist with modern legal frameworks, creating an inclusive system that addresses both communal and individual grievances.

C) DRC: LOCAL EMPOWERMENT AMIDST STATE FRAGILITY

In the DRC, where state institutions are often absent or ineffective, grass roots peace-building efforts have emerged as the most viable conflict resolution mechanisms. The research emphasizes that international actors must prioritize local empowerment and avoid imposing top-down solutions that overlook the realities on the ground. Despite the persistent violence, the success of local initiatives in promoting peace suggests that there is a foundation upon which long-term stability can be built. This study concludes that for conflict resolution mechanisms to be effective in the DRC, they must be flexible, localized, and supported by a robust international framework that respects the agency of local actors. The DRC's experience underscores the importance of integrating peace-building with state-building efforts, ensuring that local initiatives are supported by strong governance structures.

D) THE NEED FOR SYNERGY BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN SYSTEMS

A key takeaway from this research is the potential synergy between traditional and modern conflict resolution mechanisms. While traditional systems like Gacaca and Ubushingantahe have proven their effectiveness in specific contexts, they must be supported by modern legal frameworks that ensure accountability, transparency, and adherence to human rights standards. The findings from the DRC further suggest that traditional mechanisms can thrive in areas where formal state systems have collapsed, offering a path to peace in the most fragile of environments.

12.2 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The thesis opens several promising avenues for future research, which are essential for building upon the knowledge generated by this study. As the Great Lakes Region continues to face challenges related to conflict, governance, and development, the need for innovative, context-sensitive research is more critical than ever.

A) EXPLORING HYBRID CONFLICT RESOLUTION MODELS

Future research should delve deeper into hybrid models of conflict resolution that combine the strengths of both traditional and modern systems. Rwanda's Gacaca courts and Burundi's Ubushingantahe offer valuable case studies for understanding how these models can be adapted, reformed, and implemented in diverse post-conflict settings. Investigating how such models can balance local traditions with international legal norms will be crucial for creating adaptable, sustainable peace mechanisms. Moreover, future studies could focus on regions outside of the Great Lakes, applying the lessons learned from Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC to post-conflict settings in Asia, Latin America, or other parts of Africa. This would provide a global perspective on the efficacy of hybrid conflict resolution mechanisms.

B) THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Another vital area for future research involves the role of international actors in conflict resolution and peace-building. While this thesis has highlighted the limitations of top-down international interventions in the DRC, there is still much to learn about how international actors can better support local efforts without imposing external frameworks that may be culturally or politically inappropriate. Future studies could examine successful partnerships between international organizations and grass roots peace-builders, exploring how these collaborations can be scaled and replicated across other conflict-affected regions.

Additionally, research into the role of regional organizations, such as the African Union or the East African Community, in mediating conflicts within the Great Lakes Region would be highly valuable. Understanding how regional actors can complement international efforts and local initiatives will be key to developing comprehensive peace-building strategies.

C) STATE-BUILDING AND LONG-TERM PEACE

The relationship between state fragility and conflict persistence remains a critical area of inquiry. As this thesis has demonstrated, weak state institutions in Burundi and the DRC have contributed to the protracted nature of conflicts, making it difficult for both traditional and modern mechanisms to succeed. Future research could focus on how to strengthen state institutions, particularly in the areas of justice, security, and governance, to prevent the recurrence of violence. Moreover, there is a need to explore how state-building efforts can be more effectively integrated with conflict resolution mechanisms. In the DRC, for instance, future studies could examine how local peace-building initiatives can be scaled up to influence national policy and governance reforms. Understanding the interplay between local, national, and international actors will be essential for building resilient state structures that can withstand the pressures of post-conflict recovery.

D) JUSTICE, RECONCILIATION, AND POLITICAL STABILITY

Finally, the thesis raises important questions about the balance between justice, reconciliation, and political stability. In Rwanda, the Gacaca courts played a central role in promoting reconciliation, but their limitations in delivering justice for certain groups point to the ongoing tensions between these two goals. Future research could explore how other post-conflict societies have navigated this delicate balance, providing comparative insights into how justice and reconciliation can coexist in divided societies. Furthermore, the political dimensions of conflict resolution mechanisms deserve greater attention. In Burundi and Rwanda, for example, the co-option of traditional systems by political elites has undermined their credibility. Investigating how to insulate conflict resolution mechanisms from political interference will be crucial for ensuring their long-term effectiveness.

13. CONCLUSION

This thesis has made a significant contribution to the understanding of conflict resolution mechanisms in the Great Lakes Region, shedding light on the complexities of traditional and modern approaches in Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC. By highlighting the successes, limitations, and potential synergies between these mechanisms, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars engaged in peace-building. The road to sustainable peace in the Great Lakes Region is long and fraught with challenges, but the findings of this research offer hope. By embracing hybrid conflict resolution models, supporting local peace-building efforts, and strengthening state institutions, there is a path forward towards a more peaceful and just future for the region. As the region continues to evolve, future research will play a critical role in guiding these efforts, ensuring that they are informed by the lessons of the past and adapted to the realities of the present.

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