

Predictable Peace: Confidence-Building in African Post-Conflict States

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Abstract

Confidence-building in African conflict and post-conflict situations is often viewed as secondary to formal peace agreements, security measures, or economic recovery. This article argues that confidence-building is actually fundamental to maintaining peace. It presents confidence-building as the essential foundation that makes peace credible, lasting, and deeply rooted in society. Using case studies from Rwanda, South Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the article explores how confidence is created, weakened, and maintained across different areas such as institutions, social interactions, and narratives. Confidence is best understood not as trust or reconciliation, but as predictability—an expectation that restraint will be returned and that institutions will act consistently over time. The article concludes that African peace efforts often fail not because of poor agreements but due to a lack of long-term governance focused on building confidence. Publishers and media organizations play a key role in shaping the environment in which confidence can either develop or disappear.

Keywords

Confidence-Building Measures, African Post-Conflict Governance, Peacebuilding Strategy, Institutional Legitimacy, Trust, Predictability

1. Introduction

Peace is often portrayed as an event rather than a condition. Headlines and editorials typically depict the signing of agreements, the holding of elections, the withdrawal of troops, or the end of armed conflict as clear signs that peace has been achieved. These moments are treated as definitive, suggesting that peace is secured the moment it is declared. However, for communities in Africa recovering from conflict, these formal milestones usually do not align with a real sense of stability.

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While violence may decrease for a while, the lack of ongoing conflict does not ensure that people feel secure, that institutions function consistently, or that social unity has been truly restored (Autesserre, 2014). In these situations, public perceptions of peace tend to lag significantly behind the formal agreements. The formal structures of peace, such as treaties, international observer missions, and transitional governments, may create the illusion of resolution without addressing the real-life experiences and challenges that define how individuals and communities cope with life after conflict (Paris, 2004). This gap between formal and experiential peace is where confidence-building occurs. It is the quiet but essential effort of creating patterns of predictability and reliability in the behavior of both people and institutions. In this space, former enemies begin to test whether restraint will be returned, whether governing bodies will act consistently, and whether the future can be anticipated with a sense of confidence rather than fear (Reyntjens, 2013). Confidence-building does not take place through announcements but through repeated, visible actions that gradually build the expectation that the next day will not mirror the chaos of the past.

Publishing plays a unique and influential role in this process. The editorial choices made by media outlets shape public understanding of peace. Decisions about which events to feature, how setbacks are framed, and whether small steps forward are recognized or ignored all influence how society views stability. When editors present peace as a completed project, any violation, delay, or failure is seen as a major disaster. However, when coverage portrays peace as a delicate, ongoing effort, the public is more likely to see setbacks as temporary rather than as signs of failure (Wolfsfeld, 2004). Through this framing, publishers can promote patience and resilience, showing that gradual progress, not dramatic endings, is the foundation of lasting peace.

Confidence-building, therefore, is not a secondary activity in post-conflict governance; it is the core mechanism through which peace gains credibility. It depends on the development of predictable institutional behavior, the reinforcement of norms, and the careful management of public expectations. Media that show patterns over time, place minor lapses into context, and highlight the cumulative effect of repeated compliance can transform abstract institutional changes into real social confidence (Autesserre, 2014; Mamdani, 2001). The process of building peace is continuous, and the responsibility extends beyond simply reporting events to shaping the narrative that helps society interpret the reliability, fairness, and consistency of post-conflict institutions. In short, peace is not only announced; it must be observed, reinforced, and understood—tasks that are deeply connected to the role of publishing in fragile African contexts.

2. Conceptual Framework: Confidence, Trust, and Predictability in African Conflict Settings

The conceptual basis for confidence-building in African post-conflict situations is not well-established in academic or policy discussions. Words like trust, confidence, reconciliation, and legitimacy are often used without clear distinction, even

though they have different meanings and important implications for peacebuilding. For the publisher, who aims to provide both clarity and understanding, this lack of precision has real-world effects. When these terms are not clearly defined, it can lead to misaligned expectations, flawed assessments of interventions, and misunderstandings of both challenges and achievements. In African communities that have experienced civil war, genocide, or long-term political violence, such confusion can make the situation more unstable instead of helping to stabilize it.

Confidence-building in these situations should be viewed not as a personal or moral state, but as a practical and observable condition. Confidence emerges from the belief that individuals, groups, or institutions will behave according to rules, norms, and predictable outcomes. Unlike trust, it does not require goodwill, shared identity, reconciliation, or moral agreement between former enemies. Confidence is based on the idea that rules are consistently enforced, agreements are honored, and violations are met with consequences. When confidence is built effectively, people, communities, and political actors are able to make decisions, invest resources, and interact with each other without the constant fear of sudden disruption. Framing peace as a result of functional confidence rather than abstract trust allows for more credible public narratives that are based on real-world behavior rather than emotional sentiments.

2.1. Confidence versus Trust

In discussions about peacebuilding, confidence and trust are often treated as the same, despite their significant differences. Trust involves believing that another party has good intentions or goodwill, and is based on relationships and moral considerations. Trust suggests that people will act in ways that benefit others because they genuinely want to. Confidence, however, is about believing that behavior is shaped by enforceable rules, institutional structures, social reputations, or material benefits, rather than by kindness or moral alignment (Luhmann, 1979).

In African post-conflict contexts, trust may not be a realistic or appropriate expectation, especially in societies that have been shaped by trauma, group anger, or shared memories of violence. Demands for immediate trust or emotional healing can be counterproductive, increasing resistance and skepticism. Former enemies do not need to like or forgive each other to live in peace; they need to believe that rules are followed, violations are addressed, and behavior is consistently managed when norms are broken. This functional confidence is enough to provide a baseline of predictability, allowing actors to function in a fragile environment without resorting to preventive violence.

Focusing on confidence rather than trust changes how the story is told. Reporting that highlights patterns of behavior, compliance with institutional guidelines, or consistent enforcement of agreements allows the public to measure progress based on observable and verifiable actions. For example, in Rwanda, confidence in post-genocide governance was not initially based on reconciliation across ethnic groups, but on the predictable enforcement of laws and delivery of services.

Citizens could anticipate how the government would respond to security issues or administrative requests, even if trust between groups was low (Reyntjens, 2013). In contrast, efforts to portray post-apartheid South Africa as emotionally unified risked overemphasizing the immediate level of emotional cohesion, while underemphasizing the importance of reliable institutions (Mamdani, 2001).

2.2. Confidence as Uncertainty Management

Conflict and violence are often fueled by uncertainty about the intentions, abilities, and future actions of others. In African post-conflict settings, worst-case assumptions often dominate, making preventive or preemptive violence a logical response for individuals and groups facing insecurity. Confidence-building measures (CBMs) act as tools to reduce this uncertainty. By narrowing the range of interpretations about others' behavior, CBMs allow actors to engage gradually, reducing the need for defensive actions in advance.

Successful CBMs are credible because they are limited in scope, costly to undo, and reversible. They enable participants to test intentions without committing to a final resolution. Examples in African contexts include monitored demobilization of combatants in Liberia, phased electoral reforms in Sierra Leone, and incremental judicial reforms in post-apartheid South Africa. Each step signals that commitments are being kept, even in the presence of ongoing risks or residual violence (Zartman, 2000; Banegas, 2010).

Partial steps must be effectively communicated to the public. Actions such as troop withdrawals, monitored pauses in fighting, or pilot reforms may seem inadequate when compared to full-scale solutions, yet they are essential in building confidence. Dramatic, all-or-nothing approaches often fail because they require a level of confidence that has not yet developed. Media stories that present incremental progress as a thoughtful risk-management strategy—rather than as indecision or weakness—can shape public perception and reinforce the gradual impact of CBMs. For instance, in Liberia, media coverage emphasized the gradual verification of disarmament and reintegration programs rather than focusing on isolated incidents of violence. This helped build a growing public perception of institutional reliability and predictable processes (Banegas, 2010).

2.3. Confidence as Governance Practice

Even though confidence-building measures (CBMs) are frequently linked to diplomacy or security arrangements, the most lasting form of confidence-building in African post-conflict situations is rooted in institutions and administrative systems. Post-conflict recovery is essentially a governance issue, as the success of peace depends on reliable and predictable behavior from institutions (Paris, 2004). Courts that give fair judgments, police that apply laws impartially, and administrative bodies that provide services without discrimination send a clear message to citizens that power is limited and rules are important. Over time, these consistent behaviors help build confidence, even in societies where reconciliation

is not complete or trust between groups is low.

Institutions act as communicators. Every decision they make, every ruling they issue, or every administrative action they take communicates something about who is considered important, what behaviors are encouraged or punished, and whether agreements can be enforced. In African post-conflict societies, institutions often have a history of being exclusionary, repressive, or only partially legitimate. Building trust requires more than a single reform or one-time effort. It needs visible, repeated, and steady actions over time. A single fair court ruling or a single improvement in service delivery is not enough. Confidence comes from patterns that people can see, understand, and rely on.

Publishers play a vital role in this process. By tracking how institutions perform over time, explaining setbacks, and showing trends in how rules are followed, media helps societies see gradual progress and reduces the sense that things are unstable. For instance, in Rwanda, reporting on the consistent enforcement of laws and regular government communication helped citizens form expectations about how institutions would behave, even during social tensions (Reyntjens, 2013). Similarly, in post-apartheid South Africa, media stories that showed steady improvements in service delivery and judicial independence strengthened public trust, supporting symbolic efforts like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Mamdani, 2001).

In this way, confidence-building is both practical and shaped by social interaction. Institutions create patterns of behavior that can be observed. Publishing helps explain these patterns, explaining their context and sharing the patterns with the public. When the actions of institutions align with what people hear from the media, confidence grows. When they don't match, even well-intended reforms may not build trust or predictability, leaving societies open to sliding back into violence. African post-conflict experiences show that peace isn't just the absence of conflict, but the presence of reliable, credible governance supported by consistent public stories.

3. Approach and Case Selection

This study adopts a comparative, qualitative approach to examine how confidence-building operates across diverse African post-conflict environments. The six cases—Rwanda, South Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo—were selected through a most-different systems logic. They vary significantly in conflict type (genocide, civil war, apartheid, regionalized war), scale of violence, institutional capacity, and degree of international intervention, yet all faced the shared challenge of rebuilding public confidence after large-scale political violence. This variation allows for the identification of recurring patterns in confidence-building despite differing political trajectories and governance models.

The evidence base for each case relies primarily on secondary academic literature, policy reports from international and regional organizations, and docu-

mented media narratives. For Rwanda and South Africa, the analysis draws heavily on scholarly monographs, transitional justice research, and institutional assessments, complemented by domestic and international media reporting on governance reforms and reconciliation initiatives. The Liberia and Sierra Leone cases rely on peacebuilding evaluations, DDR program reports, electoral observation documents, and studies of community radio and local media content. Burundi is examined through analyses of the Arusha framework, power-sharing research, and policy reporting on post-2005 governance dynamics. The Democratic Republic of Congo case is based on conflict studies literature, UN and regional monitoring reports, and reporting on ceasefires, elections, and localized stabilization efforts.

Together, this multi-source evidence base enables structured comparison while acknowledging variation in data quality and media freedom across cases. By combining scholarly analysis with policy documentation and media narratives, the study grounds its comparative claims in documented institutional performance and publicly available accounts of how confidence-building processes were interpreted and communicated.

4. African Case Studies: Institutional and Narrative Lessons

4.1. Rwanda: Predictability, Authority, and the Limits of Horizontal Confidence

Rwanda's post-genocide reconstruction is one of the most talked about cases of fast institutional rebuilding in modern African history. After the 1994 genocide, which killed an estimated 800,000 people in about 100 days, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took control and was responsible for rebuilding a broken political and social system (Reyntjens, 2013). What made Rwanda's approach different from other post-conflict situations was the centralized authority, an all-encompassing justice plan that combined formal and traditional methods, and a focus on predictable governance.

In the early years after the genocide, the Rwandan government carried out major reforms in legal, economic, and administrative areas. The Gacaca court system, for example, was set up to deal with the huge number of genocide cases through community-based trials, combining public involvement with government oversight (Clark, 2010). At the same time, regular courts and legal changes were strengthened to ensure a consistent application of the law. These actions helped meet judicial needs but also supported broader goals of predictability—defined here as citizens' ability to expect how institutions would behave and what outcomes they would bring.

Reyntjens (2013) suggests that this predictability built vertical confidence, meaning that citizens came to believe in the state's ability to provide essential services, ensure safety, and uphold laws. For many Rwandans, life after 1994 involved regular interactions with institutions that were becoming more predictable in their actions and expectations. Schools reopened, health services were restored, and local government systems operated with a level of consistency that had not been seen immediately after the genocide. Such institutional reliability was a pow-

erful tool for restoring daily life and basic order.

However, Rwanda's experience also shows the limits of vertical confidence, especially when horizontal confidence—trust between different communities and across social groups—is limited. Since 1994, the political environment in Rwanda has been tightly controlled, with restrictions on political diversity and limited space for different opinions. Scholars like Thomson (2018) and Straus (2012) argue that this control helped bring stability but also prevented open discussions about identity and governance. As a result, horizontal confidence—the kind that comes from real social reconciliation and mutual trust between groups—has not been widespread.

In terms of narratives, Rwanda's media environment—including official messages, news reports, and international coverage—played an important role in shaping how institutions were seen. Government messages focused on themes like national unity, economic progress, and social change, reinforcing the idea that Rwanda was on a clear path to stability. At the same time, international media and academic analysis often highlighted Rwanda's development successes, especially in poverty reduction and public health, even as they questioned the political limitations. This narrative support helped solidify public views of reliability, presenting predictable institutions as the main part of post-conflict recovery.

A concrete example of narrative reinforcement can be seen in the role of *The New Times*, Rwanda's leading English-language newspaper, which consistently framed post-1994 governance through themes of national unity, anti-corruption enforcement, and performance-based accountability. Regular reporting on local government evaluations under the *Imihigo* performance contract system presented administrative compliance as measurable and expected, reinforcing vertical predictability (Reyntjens, 2013; Thomson, 2018). In broadcast media, Radio Rwanda and affiliated outlets repeatedly emphasized security updates, development milestones, and official responses to dissent, often presenting state intervention as orderly and procedural rather than coercive. This repetition normalized the expectation that disputes would be managed institutionally. International coverage in outlets such as the *BBC* and *The Economist* similarly amplified Rwanda's economic growth and public health successes, contributing to an external narrative of technocratic reliability even while academic literature questioned political pluralism (Straus, 2012).

Yet the Rwandan case also warns against seeing predictability as a sign of inclusive legitimacy. While institutional actions were consistent and led to real benefits, the space for different opinions remained limited, and true horizontal reconciliation was uneven. This suggests that long-term social confidence requires more than well-functioning institutions—it requires inclusive legitimacy, where different groups feel represented and heard.

4.2. South Africa: Symbolic Confidence and the Challenge of Material Inequality

South Africa's shift from apartheid to a democratic system in 1994 serves as a

contrasting example where symbolic confidence had a major role. The agreement that ended many years of institutionalized racial separation led to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a constitutional guarantee of human rights, and new legal protections intended to recognize past wrongs and guide a fairer future (Mamdani, 2001).

The TRC became a strong symbol of moral accountability. It offered a public space where victims and those who committed violence during the apartheid period could share their stories, ask for forgiveness, and face the consequences of systematic injustice. As Thörn (2008) explains, the TRC helped build a narrative of national unity by acknowledging pain and asserting a shared commitment to democracy. In the early days of democracy, this symbolic confidence turned into broad optimism, both at home and abroad. South Africa was praised as a model of peaceful change and moral leadership.

However, this early confidence did not automatically lead to reliable institutions in the daily lives of citizens. Scholars such as Seekings & Nattrass (2005) and Southall (2013) point out that structural inequalities in income, land ownership, access to quality education, and public services continued long after apartheid ended. While democratic institutions represented democratic values and provided symbolic assurances, many South Africans still faced unequal service delivery and limited access to economic opportunities.

Over time, the distance between symbolic promises and real outcomes weakened public confidence. There was a growing feeling that the guarantees in the constitution and symbolic gestures had not been matched by real and lasting improvements in everyday life. This shows an important lesson: symbolic actions alone cannot keep public trust alive without steady institutional performance and real results.

Media and publishing played a key role in shaping and reshaping public narratives. Early coverage of the TRC and democratic transition focused on reconciliation and the success of the constitution. However, later reporting often turned to issues like corruption, failed service delivery, and social unrest. Domestic media explored the gap between policy talk and real results, while international media highlighted the ongoing inequality and social division. The way these stories were told affected how both South Africans and the global community viewed the country's progress.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings were broadcast nationally by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), allowing citizens to witness testimony in real time. This extensive coverage transformed the TRC into a shared national experience rather than a closed legal process, reinforcing symbolic confidence in constitutional democracy (Thörn, 2008). Newspapers such as the *Mail & Guardian* and *Business Day* initially framed the transition as a moral breakthrough, frequently using the language of reconciliation and “miracle transition”.

However, in the 2000s, investigative reporting—particularly on corruption

scandals and service delivery failures—shifted the narrative toward institutional accountability gaps. Coverage of municipal protests and state capture allegations (Southall, 2013) reframed public expectations, highlighting the disconnect between constitutional symbolism and material governance outcomes. This shift illustrates how media narratives recalibrated confidence from symbolic unity to performance-based evaluation.

Therefore, South Africa shows that symbolic confidence needs to be backed by real and institutional reliability to maintain public trust. When the symbolic and real aspects of governance drift apart, the result can be loss of trust and declining civic involvement.

4.3. Liberia: Incremental Reintegration and Predictability

Liberia's civil wars (1989-2003) left the country deeply divided, with many armed groups, broken institutions, and large-scale displacement. The 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement laid the foundation for a peacebuilding effort that included a series of gradual reforms to restore governance and public confidence.

Important among these reforms were judicial restructuring, security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, and monitored elections. According to Zartman (2000), Liberia's peacebuilding process emphasized the step-by-step integration of former combatants into civilian life and the creation of predictable governance structures like set electoral schedules and institutional appointments.

The monitored elections that followed the Accra agreement, including the 2005 election that brought Ellen Johnson Sirleaf into power, played a major role in building vertical confidence—citizens saw clear patterns in how public power was managed and how political leadership changed. Reintegration programs placed former fighters into economic programs and vocational training, reducing the chances of renewed violence and promoting stability.

Media coverage in Liberia, despite limited infrastructure and uneven access, framed these developments as clear and verifiable steps towards stable governance. International media also highlighted the role of monitored elections and DDR programs in building trust. This media attention helped reinforce the predictable nature of the process and built public expectations that governance reforms were not random but part of a clear plan.

During Liberia's disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process, local newspapers such as the *Daily Observer* and radio stations like ELBC regularly published verification figures on weapons collected and combatants processed. Reporting often emphasized numerical milestones—numbers disarmed, cantonment sites closed, vocational trainees enrolled—turning technical benchmarks into visible signs of procedural progress (Banegas, 2010). Similarly, international reporting on the 2005 election that brought Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to power highlighted the orderly conduct of polling stations and the presence of international observers. Coverage by outlets such as *Reuters* and *BBC Africa* framed

the election as peaceful and procedurally credible, reinforcing vertical confidence that leadership change could occur through ballots rather than violence.

The Liberian case shows that predictable, incremental governance reforms can stabilize expectations and that media coverage that highlights these steps strengthens public confidence. However, as in other cases, maintaining long-term confidence requires consistent follow-through on the promises made in early reforms.

4.4. Sierra Leone: Community-Driven Initiatives and Horizontal Confidence

Sierra Leone's civil war ended in 2002 with a peace agreement that began a complex transition to stability. Unlike in other situations where the central government led most efforts, Sierra Leone's post-conflict recovery focused heavily on community-driven reintegration, strengthening local governance, and judicial reform (Banegas, 2010).

One of the key elements of Sierra Leone's peace process was the reintegration of ex-combatants, supported by formal programs and community acceptance. The aim was not only to disarm fighters but also to rebuild social bonds and shared expectations within affected communities. Researchers like Richards (2005) highlight that community forums, local councils, and participatory projects formed the basis of horizontal confidence—trust among citizens who had previously been in violent conflict.

Local media, especially community radio stations, played an important role in this process. By sharing stories of reconciliation, highlighting small improvements in local governance, and offering a space for various voices, these media outlets contributed to narratives of inclusive progress. Unlike top-down coverage that focused on national changes, community media helped citizens observe gradual and visible improvements in their neighborhoods and social circles.

Community radio played a particularly measurable role in shaping post-war expectations. Stations such as Radio UNAMSIL (later Radio Democracy 98.1) broadcast call-in programs where former combatants, local chiefs, and civil society representatives discussed reintegration and local governance reforms. These forums made dispute resolution visible and normalized dialogue as a legitimate mechanism for addressing grievances (Richards, 2005; Banegas, 2010). Programs frequently highlighted small but concrete improvements—school reopenings, local council meetings, agricultural initiatives—framing them as shared community achievements rather than top-down directives. By focusing on local voices and incremental recovery, community broadcasting strengthened horizontal confidence and helped citizens interpret peace as participatory and ongoing rather than externally imposed.

The Sierra Leonean example suggests that horizontal confidence—trust between citizens from different social groups—can be built when governance changes involve local participants and when media coverage reflects community-level progress. This bottom-up confidence supports vertical confidence and helps create a

more unified sense of public trust.

4.5. Burundi: Power Sharing and Manageable Disputes

After 2005, Burundi's peacebuilding process included a series of negotiations, agreements, and institutional arrangements aimed at reducing ethnic tensions and encouraging cooperation. The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, which came before the official end of widespread conflict, highlighted the importance of sharing power among ethnic groups, monitoring elections, and demobilizing armed groups (Uvin, 2009).

These power-sharing arrangements created predictable frameworks for representation within government bodies and security forces, which helped reduce competition for political influence. The consistent application of agreed-upon rules, such as quotas and oversight mechanisms, enabled political actors to work together, even when trust was still fragile.

From a narrative perspective, Burundi's political communications and media often presented disputes not as signs of system failure but as manageable issues within the broader context of peacebuilding. In situations where renewed conflict was possible, this framing helped maintain the strength of institutions by focusing on the durability of agreements and the potential for peaceful resolution. Over time, these narratives contributed to a sense of continuity, helping the public see political disagreements as part of normal governance rather than as existential threats.

Following the implementation of the Arusha framework, national media outlets and political communication platforms frequently framed ethnic quota implementation and coalition negotiations as procedural obligations rather than zero-sum contests. Reporting in publications such as *Iwacu* often described parliamentary disputes in terms of constitutional process—debates, votes, oversight—rather than existential ethnic confrontation (Uvin, 2009). However, during moments of political tension, especially surrounding the 2015 electoral crisis, divergent narratives emerged. Independent media that questioned executive decisions were restricted or suspended, demonstrating how limits on media pluralism can weaken confidence by reducing transparency. The contrast between earlier procedural framing and later restrictions illustrates how narrative consistency is directly linked to institutional resilience.

4.6. Democratic Republic of Congo: Partial Gains Amid Persistent Conflict

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) represents one of the most difficult cases of post-conflict reconstruction in Africa. Even after formal peace processes and agreements, particularly the 2003 Pretoria Accord, which was supposed to end the Second Congo War, the country has continued to face violence involving multiple armed groups, porous borders, and weak or absent state authority in many regions (Stearns, 2011).

Efforts to build confidence in the DRC have included measures such as ceasefire agreements, transitional justice programs, and initiatives to strengthen local governance. While these efforts have led to some localized improvements, systemic challenges have limited their broader effects. In certain areas, vertical confidence in state institutions exists—citizens regularly interact with local offices, civil servants, or security personnel. However, horizontal confidence—trust between different ethnic or factional groups—remains weak due to recurring violence and the ongoing presence of armed groups.

In the DRC, media and international reporting often highlight incremental progress, such as local disarmament successes or electoral milestones, framing these as steps toward eventual national stability. These narratives help contextualize partial gains and prevent isolated setbacks from overshadowing overall progress. However, when institutional performance is inconsistent or violence resurges, these narratives can be undermined by conflicting interpretations, leading to uncertainty and fluctuating public confidence.

In the DRC, UN-affiliated outlets such as Radio Okapi—established by MONUC—have played a central informational role. Radio Okapi regularly reported on local ceasefire adherence, DDR participation, and election logistics, providing region-specific updates that translated complex peace processes into accessible, repeated information (Stearns, 2011). This helped create localized vertical confidence even when national stability remained fragile. International media coverage of the 2006 and 2018 elections frequently emphasized voter turnout figures, logistical challenges, and observer assessments. While such reporting highlighted procedural milestones, it also exposed irregularities, contributing to fluctuating public confidence. The coexistence of progress-oriented and skepticism-oriented narratives illustrates how fragile confidence remains when institutional performance is uneven.

4.7. Comparative Reflections: Patterns in Confidence Building

Across these six African cases, several clear patterns emerge that provide insights into broader dynamics in post-conflict governance and public confidence.

1) **Vertical confidence is easier to establish than horizontal confidence.** Vertical confidence—trust in the predictability and performance of state institutions—is more easily built through consistent service delivery, legal reforms, and strong enforcement of security. Rwanda, Liberia, and Sierra Leone each demonstrated that when citizens can reliably expect institutional behavior, trust in those institutions becomes more stable. Horizontal confidence—trust between communities with past conflicts—requires more intentional social reconciliation efforts and sustained engagement across group boundaries.

2) **Incrementalism builds sustainable confidence.** Small, measurable steps towards institutional reform, whether through monitored elections, community reintegration programs, or local governance initiatives, significantly contribute to citizens' sense that change is real and not just talk. Incremental progress allows

people to evaluate progress against clear markers, which builds trust over time.

3) **Narrative alignment matters.** The way media and publishing environments frame institutional actions shapes how the public interprets what is happening. When narratives consistently align with institutional actions—through national media, local radio, or international reporting—they help match public expectations with governance paths. However, when narratives do not match reality, confidence can be undermined.

4) **Symbolic measures are insufficient alone.** Symbolic confidence-boosting actions, such as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, can create initial optimism but must be supported by ongoing institutional performance to have a lasting impact on public trust. Symbolic actions without real follow-through can lead to unmet expectations.

5) **Confidence is temporal.** Consistent and predictable behavior over time is more important than dramatic gestures. Trust increases when institutions reliably deliver predictable outcomes over months and years, shaping what political sociologists call institutional habitus—deeply ingrained expectations about how authority functions.

5. Strategy and Tactics of African Confidence-Building

African states and regional organizations have increasingly recognized the importance of confidence-building measures (CBMs) as a way to reduce tensions, prevent conflict escalation, and promote long-term stability. Effective confidence-building in African contexts requires careful consideration of the local political, social, and historical environment, ensuring that strategies are practical, culturally appropriate, and sustainable. These strategies combine over-arching principles with specific tactics that translate these concepts into real-world actions.

5.1. Strategic Principles

1) **Incrementalism over immediacy.** African confidence-building efforts focus on taking slow, step-by-step actions that can be checked and verified, instead of making sudden or large-scale changes. This way, there is less risk of overreaching and more chance of achieving realistic goals. For example, carrying out security reforms in stages or gradually improving how security institutions are managed allows all involved to track progress and make changes based on what they see happening (Brauch, 2014). By focusing on clear and measurable progress, this approach helps build trust between groups that may have past conflicts or mutual distrust.

2) **Predictability over ambition.** Trust is usually not built through highly ambitious or risky projects. Instead, being steady and dependable over time increases the belief that others can rely on you. When actions are predictable, like keeping peace agreements or consistently providing public services, it shows that you are reliable, and this builds trust with both local and international partners (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007). Predictable actions help reduce confusion and uncertainty in

unstable situations, setting the stage for better teamwork.

3) **Reversibility over permanence.** Trying out or testing new approaches that can be undone if needed allows parties to experiment with working together without having to make long-term and final decisions. This idea is especially useful in societies that are dealing with the aftermath of conflict, where things are still changing and there's a risk of going back to old ways (Miall, 2004). Using temporary missions to monitor situations, starting with small projects to reform courts, or slowly removing military forces all offer a way to see if things work, learn from problems, and gradually build trust before making final and lasting decisions.

4) **Visibility without spectacle.** The actions taken should be clear and noticeable enough to help build trust, but not done just for show. Measures that are publicly known, such as sharing information about security events or engaging with local communities, help show that institutions are trustworthy and responsible (Stedman, 1997). By keeping things from getting too much attention, countries can avoid the feeling that they are only making fake efforts while still making sure their confidence-building steps are seen as real and meaningful.

5.2. Tactical Instruments

1) **Security Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs).** These include monitored ceasefires, joint patrols, and the removal of weapons. These measures are essential in lowering the risk of armed conflict and showing that the parties involved are serious about working together (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009).

2) **Judicial and Policing Reform.** It is important to have fair and consistent application of the law to build trust in society. Reform efforts may involve training security personnel, making sure the judiciary is independent, and creating systems that hold people accountable to stop abuse and corruption (Anning, 2013).

3) **Inclusive Service Delivery.** Ensuring everyone has access to justice, education, healthcare, and other public services shows that the government is committed to the whole population. This inclusivity helps reduce anger and dissatisfaction that can lead to instability and builds confidence in government institutions (OECD, 2010).

4) **Structured Communication.** Clear and open communication through public reports, media interaction, and discussions with different groups ensures that confidence-building efforts are well understood and accepted. Good communication helps manage expectations, explain intentions, and stop the spread of false information that could harm trust (Lund, 1996).

By using these important strategies and tools, African confidence-building efforts can help create lasting peace, improve governance, and bring different groups in society together.

6. Spoilers, Setbacks, and System Resilience

In African peacebuilding efforts, spoilers, people or groups that try to stop or mess up peace processes, are part of the political and social environment. These can be

armed groups, political leaders, or local communities who feel their problems are not being addressed. Their reasons for acting against peace can range from strong beliefs to taking advantage of the situation to gain power. Their actions often cause setbacks that challenge the strength of new peace systems. A key part of confidence-building is the ability of institutions to resist these disruptions without breaking down (Stedman, 1997).

Resilience here means having predictable, clear, and steady responses from institutions. When governments or leaders handle violations of agreements or other harmful actions in a calm and expected way, they reduce uncertainty and prevent fear or distrust among the public. For instance, when a ceasefire is broken, a resilient system doesn't respond with harsh military action but instead watches the situation, shares what happened openly, and takes steps to fix the problem. This process shows that rules and procedures are reliable, which builds confidence in institutions (Wolfsfeld, 2004).

Sharing information about setbacks and violations is another important strategy. By clearly explaining the background and effects of disruptions, governments and civil society can stop the public from reacting too strongly, stop the spread of false stories, and keep order. Being transparent turns possible crises into chances to strengthen resilience. It shows that institutions are not only able to handle setbacks but also open to being held accountable and learning, which helps keep public trust even during tough times.

7. Measurement, Metrics, and Limit

Measuring confidence in post-conflict African societies is complicated. Using numbers like survey results, how well people follow ceasefires, or how many reforms are done, gives useful but limited information about public and institutional confidence. These numbers can show whether formal obligations are being met, but they might miss subtle changes in how people feel, trust, and act—important factors in understanding confidence-building.

Qualitative signs are often better at showing early changes and give deeper insights into trust development. Patterns of people joining public meetings, consistent actions by government institutions, and the tone of public discussions can show trends that come before real results. For example, more citizens getting involved in local governance even before full reforms are done can signal a growing belief in how responsive the government is (Autesserre, 2014).

Media, civil society groups, and other information sources play a key role in bringing these qualitative signs to light. By showing small but real progress, pointing out consistent actions by institutions, and presenting challenges in a positive way, these groups make small gains visible. This not only helps institutions learn from within but also builds societal belief in progress. When these qualitative signs are used with numerical data, experts and peacebuilders get a better overall picture of confidence, which helps make smarter decisions and more adaptable strategies.

8. Toward a Confidence-Centered Peacebuilding Paradigm

Traditional approaches to peacebuilding in Africa have often focused on agreements, like peace treaties, ceasefire deals, or agreements on elections, as signs of success. While these formal steps are important, they don't ensure lasting peace. A confidence-centered approach changes the focus from the agreements themselves to the gradual building of trust through observable and predictable behavior by institutions.

Putting this approach into practice requires several important changes. First, timelines need to be longer to reflect how slowly trust can grow. Change doesn't happen quickly; trust is built through steady and visible actions by institutions and their consistent responses to challenges. Second, careful storytelling is important. Public communication must match what institutions are actually doing, showing both successes and ongoing challenges without making things up. This clear and consistent communication prevents people from getting upset when they see a gap between promises and reality.

Third, accepting partial progress is necessary. Small steps, partial reforms, and even limited involvement in peacebuilding efforts add up to build confidence. Putting too much focus on full compliance or quick transformation can hurt long-term goals by setting unrealistic expectations or causing resistance. So, the focus moves from short-term formal steps to long-term behavioral changes that build credibility and trust over time.

Success in a confidence-centered approach is measured not by how many agreements are signed but by whether institutions act in a way that is predictable, reliable, and honest. Public messages that support these behaviors help create and maintain trust, leading to a cycle of stability. In African societies where past issues, group differences, and weak institutions are ongoing problems, this kind of approach offers a practical and lasting way to build peace. By placing trust, predictability, and transparency at the center, confidence-centered strategies help turn fragile agreements into strong, lasting peace systems that can handle challenges, spoilers, and unexpected events.

9. Conclusion

Building confidence is the ongoing task that starts once formal agreements are signed, but the true challenge of achieving peace lies ahead. Unlike the high-profile moments of negotiation or signing treaties, this work is repetitive, not flashy, and often lacks political recognition. However, it is crucial: peace is not lost just because agreements are imperfect, but because trust among the involved parties, institutions, and communities has not been sufficiently developed to handle inevitable flaws. Real confidence grows slowly, through the establishment of stable expectations, reliable and predictable actions by institutions, and the alignment of public narratives with lived experiences over time.

Publishing, through media, reports from civil society, and official communication, plays a key role in this effort. By recording how institutions perform, placing

setbacks within a broader context, and maintaining clear and consistent stories, publishers help turn individual actions into recognizable patterns of reliability. This enables citizens, local leaders, and regional partners to see institutional behavior as stable and dependable, thereby strengthening trust both between the government and the people, and among different groups and stakeholders.

In short, the work of building confidence through publishing shows that peace is not just a declaration or a symbolic act; it is a continuous condition that must be actively maintained through patience, openness, and honesty. In African post-conflict societies, where long-standing grievances and weak institutions make the system more vulnerable to breakdowns, the long-term survival of peace relies heavily on this largely unseen work. The constant, day-to-day effort of creating, maintaining, and reinforcing trust is what turns agreements into lasting stability, making peace not only possible, but strong and believable.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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