Conclusions: What Works, What Doesn’t and Why?

The overarching objective of this study was to examine the African Union’s peacekeeping role in African conflicts and also to learn from these operations in order to better understand how to build on these lessons to improve the outcomes of AU peace operations in the future. The review of the literature in the field of armed conflicts, peace operations and those international and African institutions designed to manage conflict, formed the basis for developing a framework for the study. Reviewing the literature also assisted with developing the research questions as well as in designing the field research instruments. The field research and the data analysis provided an empirical basis for the study. Moreover, the research questions were addressed by juxtaposing field data with the information gathered from the scholarly literature. This chapter will follow the structure of this book by revisiting the research questions and addressing them in relation to interpreting the results of the study.

By engaging in designing the concluding chapter, I am setting out to understand the designing of what works as opposed to what doesn’t in relation to the planning and implementation of actions involved in the AU’s peace operations, with respect to their bid to secure peace and security in Africa. Furthermore, I elucidated the issue of “success” of peace operations where I analysed and underlined the issues of the political success of the peace missions examined in this book (both the UN and AU-mandated operations) as distinct from the organisational and financial issues associated with peace operations. I demonstrated that despite the AU’s organisational weaknesses and resource constraints, the pan-African institution has been able to demonstrate greater political flexibility in its responses to many threats to African peace and security, thereby making AU peace operations more timely, appropriate and adaptable.

One of the questions that I addressed in this book was, Considering the emerging patterns from recent African conflicts, what problems are associated with UN peacekeeping operations in Africa that have attempted to manage these conflicts? The UN is, undoubtedly, the principal custodian
of international peace and security, but a critical examination of its peace operations in dealing with post-Cold War African conflicts revealed many problems (both political and organisational), which accounted for its failures in such conflict contexts as Somalia and Rwanda in the 1990s. These failures reinforced the belief of African leaders that UN peacekeeping was unreliable and could not guarantee African security.

My analyses of the various UN peace operations in Africa have made it evident that the nature of post-Cold War African conflicts constitutes the greatest challenge to the traditional peacekeeping model with its holy trinity principles. This is because the consent of conflicting parties is very difficult to secure. Also, most of the parties are non-state actors, predominately fighting to achieve parochial interests.

The difficulties that lead to unreliable UN peace operations in African conflicts are deep-seated. First, in terms of the political issues and difficulties, the problem of the UN is clearly seen when there is a lack of consensus, mainly among the P-5, when it comes to the question of what to do when faced with some very complex and complicated African conflicts. The weight of politics at the UN as an institution, and at the UN Security Council in particular, delays organisational responses to African security challenges. This is particularly so when the strategic interests of the P-5 are not threatened or at stake. The UN is a very political organisation and the politics (among the P-5 in particular) behind most of the political and security issues in the UN make it difficult for the organisation to make prompt decisions. This situation is detrimental to successfully resolving African conflicts. The consequences of the excessive politicisation of issues are such that the deployments of UN peace missions in Africa are invariably delayed – as the experiences of UNAMID and ONUB (in Burundi) revealed – no deployment at all eventuates – as the present situation in Somalia illustrates – or there is a withdrawal of UN peacekeepers, as in the cases of Angola (UNAVEM III), Somalia (UNOSOM II) and Rwanda (UNAMIR) in the 1990s.

The problems with UN peace operations in African conflicts become inflamed because there is a general lack of political will to deal with or resolve some of the internal conflicts, especially those that occur within the context of so-called collapsed states. Equally, the major powers are not interested in sending their troops to UN peace operations in Africa. This situation is quite surprising because for many years African soldiers have been involved in UN peacekeeping operations in different parts of the world. It is noteworthy that between 1948 and 2008, African troops participated in 53 out of 63 UN peace operations. And troops from Africa accounted for 40 per cent of the peacekeepers deployed worldwide during the same period (Adebajo 2011: 17).

Turning to the second issue contributing to UN peacekeeping failures in some African conflicts, especially in the 1990s, these operations were sometimes challenged by a lack of required logistics. A high degree success is possible when peace operations are provided with the resources and