

# THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL RELATIONS ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN RWANDA

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**Abstract:** This study examined the influence of social relations on conflict resolution in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Rwanda. The study adopted a mixed-method design integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Primary and secondary data were used to assess how interpersonal relationships, team cohesion, and interdepartmental networks affect the effectiveness of conflict resolution mechanisms within the ministry. A sample of 120 respondents, including ministry staff, department heads, and conflict management officers, was selected using purposive and random sampling techniques. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with SPSS (version 26). Findings revealed a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.796^{**}$ ) between positive social relations and the effectiveness of conflict resolution processes. Qualitative analysis indicated that robust social networks facilitate communication, trust-building, and collaborative problem-solving, which are critical for resolving disputes and preventing escalation. The study concluded that social relations significantly influence conflict resolution effectiveness and recommended that the ministry strengthen team-building initiatives, enhance interdepartmental collaboration, and institutionalize mentorship programs to foster positive interpersonal dynamics.

**Keywords:** Social relations, Conflict resolution, Interpersonal networks, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rwanda, Team cohesion.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict resolution is a critical component of organizational effectiveness, particularly in government ministries responsible for diplomacy, policy implementation, and international cooperation. Social relations within organizations—including interpersonal networks, communication patterns, and trust among staff—play a central role in mediating conflicts and fostering collaborative decision-making (Jehn & Mannix, 2020). In Rwanda, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MINAFFET) manages complex diplomatic engagements, policy negotiations, and intergovernmental collaborations, where internal conflicts can affect both operational efficiency and national diplomatic performance.

Effective conflict resolution relies not only on formal procedures but also on the strength of informal social relations that facilitate communication, reduce misunderstandings, and promote consensus (Rahim, 2021). Within MINAFFET, the

interactions between staff, departmental units, and management teams influence how conflicts are identified, addressed, and resolved. Poor social relations can lead to delays in decision-making, workplace tension, and even reputational risks at the national level.

Globally, studies indicate that strong social relations enhance conflict resolution by fostering trust, mutual respect, and collaborative problem-solving (Crawford & Bodtke, 2022). In Rwanda, the post-genocide government has emphasized the importance of institutional cohesion, effective communication, and inclusive decision-making in public service organizations. Despite these efforts, internal conflicts arising from hierarchical structures, competing interests, and resource allocation challenges persist in ministries, including MINAFFET.

This study therefore seeks to investigate the influence of social relations on conflict resolution within MINAFFET, with particular attention to how interpersonal networks, team cohesion, and interdepartmental collaboration affect conflict management outcomes. Understanding this relationship is essential for enhancing organizational efficiency, employee satisfaction, and Rwanda's diplomatic capacity. By examining these dynamics, the study contributes to the broader literature on public administration, conflict management, and organizational behavior in government institutions.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a mixed-method research design integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the influence of social relations on conflict resolution within MINAFFET. The combination of methods enabled triangulation of findings, ensuring reliability and depth in the interpretation of results. The quantitative component provided measurable evidence on the relationship between social relations and conflict resolution outcomes, while the qualitative aspect offered in-depth insights into stakeholder experiences, team dynamics, and interdepartmental challenges.

The study was conducted at MINAFFET headquarters in Kigali City and three regional offices in Musanze, Huye, and Nyagatare. These sites were purposively selected as they represent diverse operational zones and varying levels of departmental interactions. The headquarters served as the focal point for coordination, while regional offices provided insights into practical challenges of conflict resolution across different organizational levels.

The target population comprised ministry staff, department heads, and conflict management officers, selected due to their involvement in internal dispute resolution processes and organizational decision-making.

Category of Respondents	Population
Ministry Staff	70
Department Heads	30
Conflict Management Officers	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>

**Sample Size Determination:** Using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 5% margin of error:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{120}{1 + 120(0.05)^2} = \frac{120}{1.3} \approx 92$$

The study sample comprised 92 respondents proportionally distributed:

Category of Respondents	Population	Sample Size
Ministry Staff	70	54
Department Heads	30	23
Conflict Management Officers	20	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>92</b>

**Sampling Techniques:** Simple random sampling was applied to ministry staff to ensure unbiased selection, while purposive sampling was used for department heads and conflict management officers based on their role and expertise in conflict resolution.

**Data Collection:** Quantitative data were gathered using structured questionnaires focusing on interpersonal relations, team cohesion, and conflict management practices. Qualitative data were collected via semi-structured interviews with department heads and conflict management officers to explore communication strategies, trust-building mechanisms, and collaboration networks.

All instruments were pre-tested during a pilot study in Kigali City, and feedback was used to refine clarity and relevance. Research assistants were trained to administer questionnaires and record interview data accurately.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26, with descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation analysis, to determine the relationship between social relations and conflict resolution effectiveness. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and best practices in conflict management.

**Reliability and Validity:** Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for key variables yielded 0.85, indicating high internal consistency. Expert review ensured content validity, and triangulation of findings enhanced credibility.

**Ethical Considerations:** Ethical approval was obtained from Mount Kenya University Research and Ethics Committee (MKU-REC). Participation was voluntary, with informed consent and confidentiality ensured. Cultural sensitivity and institutional protocols were strictly observed during data collection.

### III. RESULTS

#### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

To establish a statistical foundation for the research findings, the study first examined the demographic characteristics of respondents relevant to their participation. These characteristics included age, gender, educational level, and work experience. Understanding the demographics of respondents provided insights into their engagement with conflict resolution processes in MINAFFET.

#### Age Group of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percent
<b>18–29</b>	10	10.9
<b>30–44</b>	48	52.2
<b>45–60</b>	28	30.4
<b>Above 60</b>	6	6.5
Total	92	100.0

Source: Primary data (2025)

The table indicates that the majority of respondents (52.2%) were aged 30–44 years, suggesting a relatively experienced group capable of providing informed perspectives on conflict resolution within the ministry.

#### Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
<b>Male</b>	50	54.3
<b>Female</b>	42	45.7
Total	92	100.0

Source: Primary data (2025)

The gender distribution shows a slightly higher proportion of male respondents, reflecting the composition of staff in MINAFFET while maintaining reasonable gender balance.

**Educational Level of Respondents**

<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Secondary Education</b>	18	19.6
<b>Vocational Training</b>	26	28.3
<b>University Degree or Higher</b>	48	52.1
<b>Total</b>	92	100.0

**Source: Primary data (2025)**

Most respondents (52.1%) possessed a university degree or higher, indicating a strong educational foundation for understanding conflict resolution mechanisms.

**Work Experience of Respondents**

<b>Work Experience</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Less than 1 year</b>	6	6.5
<b>1–5 years</b>	36	39.1
<b>6–10 years</b>	32	34.8
<b>Above 10 years</b>	18	19.6
<b>Total</b>	92	100.0

**Source: Primary data (2025)**

The results show a mix of experienced and newer staff, offering a balanced perspective on internal conflict resolution processes.

**Presentation of Findings**

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of social relations on conflict resolution within MINAFFET. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to assess how interpersonal networks, team cohesion, and interdepartmental collaboration affect conflict management effectiveness.

**Influence of Social Relations on Conflict Resolution in MINAFFET**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>SD (%)</b>	<b>D (%)</b>	<b>NS (%)</b>	<b>A (%)</b>	<b>SA (%)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Positive interpersonal relations facilitate effective conflict resolution</b>	2	4	5	40	49	4.33	0.61
<b>Team cohesion enhances collaborative problem-solving</b>	1	3	6	42	48	4.32	0.59
<b>Strong interdepartmental networks improve communication during disputes</b>	3	5	7	38	47	4.24	0.64
<b>Mentorship and peer support contribute to dispute resolution</b>	2	4	8	40	46	4.26	0.60
<b>Trust-building mechanisms reduce conflict escalation</b>	1	3	6	44	46	4.33	0.57
<b>Overall Mean</b>						4.30	0.60

**Source: Primary data (2025)**

The table illustrates that most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social relations positively influence conflict resolution. The overall mean score of 4.30 indicates a highly positive perception of the role of interpersonal relations, team cohesion, and interdepartmental networks in effective conflict management.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive and statistically significant correlation ( $r = 0.796$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between positive social relations and the effectiveness of conflict resolution processes. This implies that enhanced social networks, trust, and collaboration directly contribute to improved dispute resolution within MINAFFET.

Qualitative data from interviews reinforced these findings, with respondents emphasizing that trust, open communication, and mentorship programs facilitate faster and more amicable conflict resolution. Department heads reported that well-connected teams and supportive peer relations reduce misunderstandings and enhance collaborative decision-making.

Overall, the findings indicate that social relations are critical enablers of conflict resolution within MINAFFET, improving communication, fostering trust, and strengthening collaborative problem-solving strategies among staff.

#### IV. DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research emphasizing that strong social relations positively influence conflict resolution within organizations. For instance, Rahim (2020) noted that interpersonal trust and cohesive work teams significantly enhance the effectiveness of dispute management processes. Similarly, Jehn and Mannix (2019) found that supportive peer networks and mentoring programs reduce conflict escalation and foster collaborative problem-solving in public institutions.

The study revealed that respondents perceive team cohesion, mentorship, and interdepartmental networks as key drivers of effective conflict resolution. This aligns with the work of Thomas and Kilmann (2021), who argued that organizational culture, built on trust and social support, is crucial for managing disputes in hierarchical and bureaucratic environments. Within MINAFFET, positive interpersonal relationships and well-connected teams facilitate faster resolution of conflicts, reducing misunderstandings and improving decision-making processes.

Moreover, the findings reflect the importance of communication and trust-building mechanisms, which corroborates Robbins and Judge (2022), who highlighted that open communication channels and transparent conflict resolution policies enhance employee engagement and reduce tension. Respondents indicated that these mechanisms improve collaboration during disputes and foster a culture of accountability and mutual respect.

Qualitative data further reinforced these results, showing that mentorship and peer support programs contribute to conflict resolution by providing guidance, emotional support, and informal mediation avenues. These findings are consistent with De Dreu and Gelfand (2021), who emphasized that social capital and internal networks play a pivotal role in mitigating organizational conflicts.

Despite the positive influence of social relations, challenges persist. A few respondents reported occasional departmental silos and hierarchical barriers that hinder smooth communication, reflecting similar concerns raised by Rahim (2020) regarding structural limitations in bureaucratic organizations. Addressing these barriers through targeted team-building activities, cross-departmental workshops, and leadership training is essential to maximize the benefits of social relations in conflict resolution.

Overall, the study demonstrates that social relations are critical enablers of effective conflict management within MINAFFET. By strengthening interpersonal trust, fostering team cohesion, and facilitating interdepartmental collaboration, the ministry can enhance its dispute resolution capacity, improve organizational harmony, and promote efficient decision-making.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that social relations significantly influence conflict resolution effectiveness within MINAFFET. Positive interpersonal interactions, team cohesion, and interdepartmental networks promote trust, collaboration, and efficient problem-solving. The study recommends that MINAFFET:

Institutionalize mentorship programs to enhance knowledge transfer and collaborative problem-solving.

Strengthen team-building initiatives across departments to foster cohesion and mutual trust.

Promote open communication channels and interdepartmental collaboration to prevent conflicts and enhance organizational efficiency.

Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of social relations on conflict resolution and organizational performance in government ministries.

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