

African Multidisciplinary Journal of Development (AMJD)

Page: 170 – 178

<https://amjd.kiu.ac.ug>

CON-ARB AND MED-ARB IN LABOUR LAW: EVALUATING PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS IN TANZANIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This article evaluates the concepts of con-arb (conciliation-arbitration) and med-arb (mediation-arbitration) as dispute resolution mechanisms in labour law, with specific focus on their implications for procedural fairness in Tanzania. While con-arb is firmly established in South African labour jurisprudence, and med-arb has gained traction in comparative dispute. Med-arb as a method of labour dispute resolution in Tanzania is mainly conducted under the Labour Institutions (Mediation and Arbitration) Rules G.N No. 64/2007 and the Labour Institutions Act Cap.300 R.E 2023. However, there are both legal and procedural challenges in its application. These include the absence of clear provisions in the Employment and Labour Relations Act Cap. 366 R.E 2023 as a principal legislation in labour dispute in Tanzania leading to inconsistencies between the principal Act and subsidiary Rules. In contrast, South Africa's con-arb under the Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995 and the Rules for the Conduct of Proceedings before the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration 2023 incorporates defined procedures, including objection rights, mandatory notice and application in certain disputes. The article points out that these gaps in Tanzania hinder fairness, predictability and efficiency in labour dispute resolution. It calls for legislative alignment between the principal and subsidiary laws, clearer procedural rules and strengthening of the CMA through resources, training and systematic documentation.

Key Words: Med-arb, Con-arb, Labour dispute resolution, Procedural fairness, Tanzania and South Africa

Introduction

The resolution of labour disputes forms a cornerstone of industrial relations systems in both Tanzania and South Africa. The increasing complexity of employer–employee relations has compelled many jurisdictions to innovate beyond traditional adjudicative models such as Court Litigation, Arbitration and Administrative Adjudication /non-adjudicative models such as mediation and arbitration, giving rise to hybrid dispute resolution processes that combine mediation and arbitration. Among these innovations, *Mediation–Arbitration (Med-Arb)* and *Conciliation–Arbitration (Con-Arb)* have become

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critical procedural models designed to enhance speed, cost-effectiveness, and finality in resolving workplace conflicts. These models allow a single neutral third party to mediate a dispute, and if unresolved, proceed directly to arbitrate the same matter¹.

The rationale for combining mediation/conciliation and arbitration lies on its advantage over either process alone in that they allow the parties to find their own solution (in mediation), while ensuring that the dispute will be resolved even if the parties fail to reach an agreement (through arbitration). While this is advantageous, there are practical difficulties that parties should be aware of when they select a combined process one is that not all neutrals are qualified for both roles². In addition to that, the appropriate skills are very different; a judicious decision-maker who runs an efficient adversary evidentiary hearing may not be effective in working directly and more informally with the parties to facilitate their own agreement and vice versa³. Moreover, whenever arbitration follows mediation, there is an inherent functional limitation on the potential effectiveness of the mediation step. In med/Con-Arbitration windows, the knowledge that the mediator may become a decision-maker may make parties less willing to share information with the neutral during the mediation, because revealing interests or a bottom-line might influence the neutral's decision, parties may strategically hesitate to provide any information they think could hurt their position in arbitration⁴. This article examines the legal impact of combining mediation and arbitration in Labour disputes, with a comparative focus on Tanzania and South Africa, it seeks to analyze how Med-Arb and Con-Arb processes operate within their respective legal frameworks.

Background

In Tanzania Mainland, the hybrid Med-Arb process was introduced under the Labour Institution (Mediation and Arbitration) Rules⁵ which combines mediation and arbitration within a single framework. The process is conducted on the same date and by the same person after giving parties notice such combined process⁶. Where the matter is set to be dealt with under this mechanism, the parties are entitled to at least 14 days notice in writing from the CMA⁷, when the same person has to conduct both mediation and arbitration, that person shall conduct the mediation process in a manner that does not compromise that person's ability to arbitrate the dispute⁸. Unless, the parties agree,

¹ Labour Relations Act, Act No. 66 of 1995 as amended (South Africa), s. 191(5A), Rules for the Conduct of Proceedings before the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, GN R3318 in GG 48445 of 21 April 2023 (South Africa), r. 17, Labour Institution (Mediation and Arbitration) Rules G.N No. 64/2007 (Tanzania), r.18 & Labour Institution Act (Tanzania) Cap. 366 R.E 2023, s. 19(7)

² Bartel, B.C. (1991). Med-Arb as a distinct method of dispute resolution: History, analysis and potential. *Willamette Law Review*. Pg. 688

³ Sussman, E. (2009). Developing an effective Med/Arb/Arb-Med process. *New York Dispute Resolution Lawyer*, pg. 71-78

⁴ Deason, E. E. (2013). Combinations of mediation and arbitration with the same neutral: A framework for judicial review. *Yearbook on Arbitration & Mediation*. pg. 219-249 retrieved from <https://insight.dickinsonlaw.psu.edu/arbitrationlawreview/vol5/iss1/1> on 12th October 2025

⁵ Labour Institution (Mediation and Arbitration) Rules, G.N. No. 64 of 2007, r. 18

⁶ Ibid, r 18(1)

⁷ Ibid, r 18(2)

⁸ Ibid, r. 18(6)

nothing that transpired during the mediation proceedings can be used during arbitration⁹. The operation of this Rule is subject to Section 19(7) of the Labour Institution Act¹⁰ and Section 88(3) of the Employment and Labour Relations Act¹¹. Traditionally, mediation and arbitration were envisaged as distinct and sequential stages under Section 86 of the principal Act¹² creating a legal inconsistency between the principal Act and the subsidiary Rules. The March 2025 Amendment to Section 19(7)¹³ now provides that the Act that is to mean the Labour Institution Act¹⁴ and the Employment and Labour Relations Act¹⁵ shall not preclude a person from being appointed as both mediator and arbitrator. While this amendment formally allows med-arb, it does not address procedural issues such as safeguards for impartiality.

Unlike South Africa, where the combined conciliation-arbitration (con-arb) process under Section 191(5A) of the Labour Relations Act and Rule 17 of the CCMA Conduct of Proceedings¹⁶ incorporates multiple procedural protections including the right to object through LRA Form 7.11, compulsory fourteen-day written notice, and mandatory application in specified disputes such as unfair dismissals, unfair labour practices and Basic Conditions of employment cases, Tanzania provides no similar mechanisms.

The legal silence of the Employment and Labour Relations Act regarding combined procedures, contradict with the subsidiary Rules that permit Med-Arb, generates uncertainty regarding the enforceability of Med-Arb, and may lead to disputes over the legitimacy of decisions made under this process. This conflict may also affect the neutrality and independence of the decision-maker, as the same individual conducts both mediation and arbitration without clear legislative backup. The choice of South Africa for comparative analysis is informed by the country's well-established hybrid dispute resolution framework, which provides a practical reference for examining potential adaptations in Tanzania.

Legal framework governing med-arb and con-arb: Tanzania and south Africa

Tanzania mainland: legal and institutional framework

⁹ Ibid, r 18(5)

¹⁰ Labour Institution Act, Cap 300 R.E. 2023, s 19(7) as amended by the Labour Laws (Amendments) Act, No. 4 of 2025 (Tanzania)

¹¹ Employment and Labour Relations Act, Cap 366 R.E. 2023, s 88(3) as amended by the Labour Laws (Amendments) Act, No. 4 of 2025 (Tanzania)

¹² Ibid, section 86

¹³ Labour Laws (Amendments) Act No. 4 of 2025, s 26 (Tanzania)

¹⁴ Labour Institution Act, Cap 300 R.E. 2023, as amended by the Labour Laws (Amendments) Act, No. 4 of 2025 (Tanzania)

¹⁵ Employment and Labour Relations Act, Cap 366 R.E. 2023 as amended

¹⁶ Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, s 191(5A); Rules for the Conduct of Proceedings before the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, GN R3318 in GG 48445 of 21 April 2023, r 17 (South Africa)

The Employment and Labour Relations Act [Cap. 366 R.E 2023]

The ELRA¹⁷ establishes the mechanisms for resolving labour disputes, including mediation, arbitration and adjudication through the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration (CMA) as provided under its long title *“An act to make provisions for core labour rights, to establish basic employment standards, to provide for the prevention and settlement of disputes, and to provide for related matters”*. In addition to that the Act provides for the integration of mediation and arbitration within the dispute resolution process. Moreover, under Section 86 of the ELRA¹⁸ provides for mandatory mediation of disputes before they may proceed to arbitration or adjudication. Section 88(2) of the same Act empowers the CMA to arbitrate unresolved disputes.

However, the Employment and Labour Relations Act¹⁹ remains silent on the recognition and regulation of combined mediation and arbitration (med-arb) as a distinct dispute resolution procedure. Although the Act establishes mediation and arbitration as central mechanisms for handling labour disputes, it provides for them as separate and sequential processes rather than an integrated or hybrid mechanism. Mediation is addressed under section 86²⁰, which requires parties to attempt settlement before arbitration may be pursued, while arbitration is provided under section 88²¹, empowering the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration (CMA) to issue binding awards when disputes remain unresolved. Nowhere, within the ELRA is there a provision expressly permitting or prohibiting the same individual from conducting both mediation and arbitration in the same dispute.

This legislative silence has important implications for the legal status of med-arb in Tanzania. In the absence of an explicit statutory framework, med-arb cannot be said to derive legitimacy directly from the ELRA. Rather, its status depends on subsequent institutional arrangements and related legislation, particularly the Labour Institutions Act as amended in March 2025. The omission also means that questions of procedural protection, impartiality and voluntariness of mediation outcomes remain unresolved within the ELRA itself.

The Labour Institution Act [Cap.300 R.E 2023]

The Labour Institutions Act operates as the companion statute to the Employment and Labour Relations Act²², providing the institutional framework for the resolution of labour disputes in Tanzania. Among its most important functions, the Act establishes the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration (CMA)²³, which is vested with the mandate to administer both mediation and arbitration in labour disputes. While the Employment and Labour Relations Act²⁴ outlines the substantive rights and

¹⁷ Employment and Labour Relations Act, Cap 366 R.E. 2023 (as amended by the Labour Laws (Amendments) Act, Act No. 4 of 2025)

¹⁸ Ibid, s. 86

¹⁹ Employment and Labour Relations Act, Cap 366 R.E. 2023 (as amended by the Labour Laws (Amendments) Act, Act No. 4 of 2025), s 88(2)

²⁰ Ibid, s. 86

²¹ Ibid, s. 88

²² Employment and Labour Relations Act, Cap 366 R.E. 2023 (as amended by the Labour Laws (Amendments) Act, Act No. 4 of 2025)

²³ Labour Institutions Act, Cap 300 R.E. 2023 (as amended by Labour Laws (Amendments) Act, Act No. 4 of 2025), Part III

²⁴ Ibid, Cap 366 R.E. 2023

procedural avenues for dispute settlement, it is the Labour Institutions Act that operate those mechanisms through institutional structures and administrative arrangements.

The Labour Laws (Amendments) Act²⁵ introduced a significant change to section 19(7) of the Labour Institution Act, Cap 300. The provision expressly provides that neither the Employment and Labour Institution Act shall interfere a person being appointed as both a mediator and arbitrator. This amendment has direct relevance to the legal status of med-arb in Tanzania, for the following reasons: Firstly, express recognition of Med-Arb, unlike the Employment and Labour Relations Act, which remains silent on med-arb, section 19(7) of the Labour Institutions Act explicitly recognises the possibility of combining the roles of mediator and arbitrator in labour disputes. By removing the prohibition, the amendment effectively creates statutory space for a single neutral to preside over both stages of dispute resolution. Secondly, legislative intent the wording “shall not preclude” indicates a permissive stance. The legislature has deliberately enabled flexibility by allowing mediators to transition into the role of arbitrator.

The Labour Institutions (Mediation and Arbitration) Rules [G.N. No. 64 of 2007]

The Labour Institutions (Mediation and Arbitration) Rules were promulgated to give effect to the provisions of the Labour Institutions Act²⁶, particularly in relation to the operation of the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration (CMA). These Rules establish the procedural framework for the settlement of labour disputes through mediation and arbitration. In addition to that, they are central to the discussion of the combined mediation and arbitration in Tanzania. The Rule also in Part IV (Rule 18) a critical provision for this study because it recognises the combined Mediation and Arbitration process as read together with section 19(7) of the Labour Institution Act²⁷ and section 88(3) of the Employment and Labour Relation Act²⁸ as (amended by Act No.4 of 2025), which expressly provides that nothing precludes the same person from being appointed both as a mediator and as an arbitration.

South Africa: Legal and Institutional Framework

The Labour Relations Act [Act 66 of 1995] (South Africa)

The Labour Relations Act is the principal statute governing dispute resolution in the South African Labour Sector as stated under its purpose in the long title of the statute that is “to provide simple procedures for the resolution of labour dispute through statutory conciliation, mediation and arbitration (for which purpose the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration is established), and through independent alternative dispute resolution services accredited for that purpose.

Moreover, in Chapter VII the Act establishes the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) as the statutory body responsible for conciliation, mediation and arbitration together with the functions of the Commission. In terms of Combined Conciliation and Arbitration,

²⁵ Labour Laws (Amendments), Act No. 4 of 2025

²⁶ Labour Institutions Act, Cap 300 R.E. 2023 (as amended by the Labour Laws (Amendments) Act, Act No. 4 of 2025)

²⁷ Ibid, s 19(7)

²⁸ Employment and Labour Relations Act, Cap 366 R.E. 2023 (as amended by the Labour Laws (Amendments) Act, Act No. 4 of 2025) (Tanzania)

Section 191(5A) the Act²⁹ provides for the Con-Arb (conciliation-arbitration) process, the amendment inserted subsection 191(5A), which provides that the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) or a bargaining council must commence arbitration immediately after certifying that a dispute remains unresolved in certain categories of disputes. These includes disputes relating to the dismissal of an employee for reasons connected to probation, unfair labour practices concerning probation and other disputes contemplate under section 191(5)(a) where no party has objected to the con-arb process.

Rules for the Conduct of Proceedings before the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration 2023 (South Africa)

The Labour Relations Act³⁰ establishes the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) as a statutory body mandated to resolve labour disputes through conciliation and arbitration. While the Labour Relations Act provides the substantive foundation, the Rules for the Conduct of Proceedings before the CCMA (hereinafter “CCMA Rules”) regulate the detailed procedures for the resolution of disputes, including combined conciliation-arbitration (con-arb).

Under the provision of Rule 17 of the CCMA Rules³¹ provides the framework for con-arb. It stipulates that dispute concerning dismissals for reasons related to probation, unfair labour practices relating to probation and certain other disputes under section 291(5)(a) of the Labour Relations Act³² must be scheduled for a con-arb hearing. In such cases, conciliation and arbitration are conducted in a single sitting unless a party lodges a valid objection (where the Act permits objections). This procedural rule operationalises section 191(5A) of the Labour Relations Act by making con-arb the default process for certain disputes.

Moreover, Rule 25³³ governs the right to representation during proceedings. In conciliation, parties generally represent themselves, but in arbitration (including the arbitration phase of con-arb), parties may be legally represented in specific categories of disputes, such as dismissal for misconduct or incapacity, provided that the commissioner and other parties’ consent. This ensures that while the process remains informal and cost-effective, parties’ rights to representation and fairness are protected.

Procedural Advantages and Challenges

Advantages

The study revealed that Med-Arb is generally underutilized in Tanzania. One respondent an Arbitrator from the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration reported that the procedure was last applied in Tanzania in 2017, primarily in speed-track cases such as retrenchments, especially when the employer was an external party or operated under a certificate of agency. The respondent noted that while Med-Arb allows parties to benefit from both mediation and arbitration within a single framework, concerns

²⁹ Labour Relations Act, Act 66 of 1995, s. 191(5A)

³⁰ Ibid, s. 115

³¹ Rules for the Conduct of Proceedings before the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, GN R3318 in GG 48445 of 21 April 2023 (South Africa), r.17

³² Labour Relations Act, Act No. 66 of 1995 (South Africa), Sec 291(5)(a)

³³ Rules for the Conduct of Proceedings before the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, GN R3318 in GG 48445 of 21 April 2023 (South Africa)

regarding impartiality remain significant³⁴. Despite its limited use, respondents highlighted several advantages of Med-Arb. One respondent from the CMA noted that the hybrid procedure allows parties to experience both mediation and arbitration, thereby increasing their understanding and engagement with the dispute resolution process. CMA representatives emphasized that combining the two processes reduces time and costs by consolidating proceedings.

Employers in both Tanzania and South Africa appreciated the flexibility of Med-Arb, which permits amicable settlement while preserving the option for binding arbitration if mediation fails. Additionally, one respondent from the CMA stressed that Med-Arb can be strategically beneficial in expedited disputes, such as retrenchments or cases involving external employers, offering an efficient mechanism for resolving urgent labour disputes. South African CCMA mediators recognized the potential of hybrid Con-Arb to expedite minor disputes, although procedural clarity is required to fully leverage these advantages³⁵.

Challenges

Legislative Drafting Inconsistencies

Rule 18 of the Labour Institutions (Mediation and Arbitration) Rules³⁶ purports to be subject to Section 19(7) of the Labour Institutions Act³⁷ and Section 88(3) of the Employment and Labour Relations Act³⁸, yet this principle says little on combined process and like Section 88(3) does not substantively regulate combined processes. This inconsistency creates ambiguity and undermines the clarity of the legal framework. In addition to that, there is a danger to apply regulations which are against the provisions of the principal law.

The Act of which may jeopardize the rights of the disputants and law. As seen, the Employment and Labour Relations Act³⁹ requires the labour dispute to start in CMA for Mediation which if fails, resort to arbitration, next to which the aggrieved party may move the court via procedural requirements set forth in the ELRA⁴⁰ yet the CMA Rules and guidelines governing the mediation and arbitration establish powers not to mediate but to arbitrate or apply Med-Arb and applying the later having no reliable procedures as insisted in the case of *Tanzania Breweries (TBL) Ltd vs. Charles Malabona*⁴¹ the court stating categorically that Med-Arb has no procedures governing it. There is the need to harmonize the situation for not only in the interests of the forum but also disputants and abiding to legal principles that rules or by-laws or regulations whatever, once in conflict with principal legislation.

Procedural and Structural Deficiencies in Tanzania's Combined Process

³⁴ Data collected from the Commission for Mediation and Arbitration in Dar es Salaam

³⁵ Data collected from the CCMA (South Africa), CMA (Tanzania)

³⁶ Labour Institution (Mediation and Arbitration) Rules, G.N. No. 64 of 2007

³⁷ Labour Institution Act, Cap 300 R.E. 2023 (as amended by the Labour Laws (Amendments) Act

³⁸ Employment and Labour Relations Act, Cap 366 R.E. 2023, s. 88(3) (as amended by the Labour Laws (Amendments) Act 2025

³⁹ Ibid Cap 366, s. 86

⁴⁰ Ibid Cap 366. s. 86-88

⁴¹ *Tanzania Breweries (TBL) Ltd vs. Charles Malabona* High Court of Tanzania Labour Division, Revision Number 24 of 2007

Unlike South Africa's well-defined framework under Rule 17 of the CCMA Rules, Tanzania's Med-Arb procedure lacks detailed procedural guidance on notice, objections, and sequencing. This skeletal structure undermines predictability, fairness, and confidence in the process, limiting effective party participation and procedural safeguards.

Challenges to Neutrality and Party Autonomy

The dual role of the mediator-arbitrator in Tanzania raises significant concerns regarding impartiality, as the neutral may be influenced by confidential information obtained during mediation. Moreover, the absence of objection mechanisms restricts party autonomy, rendering the process more coercive than consensual compared to South Africa's Con-Arb model, which permits limited objections and preserves procedural fairness

Recommendations

Strengthening the Legal and Institutional Framework the Tanzanian Med-Arb framework remains underdeveloped and requires statutory reform. Rule 18 of the Labour Institutions (Mediation and Arbitration) Rules, G.N. No. 64 of 2007 should be amended to provide clear procedures governing the transition between mediation and arbitration, the rights of the parties, and the responsibilities of the neutral. Legislative coherence should also be achieved by harmonizing the Employment and Labour Relations Act, Cap 366 R.E. 2023 with the Rules and by introducing a specific statutory provision similar to section 191(5A) of South Africa's Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 to establish a stronger legal foundation for Med-Arb.

Promoting Impartiality, Neutrality, and Party Autonomy

To ensure procedural fairness, Tanzania should introduce a mechanism allowing parties to object to Med-Arb within a specified timeframe, as practiced in South Africa's Con-Arb model. Where the same individual conducts both mediation and arbitration, the neutral should withdraw or another person should be appointed if information obtained in mediation may affect impartiality or neutrality. This would help strengthen confidence and fairness in the process.

Enhancing Procedural Guidance, Training, and Efficiency

Comprehensive procedural guidelines and continuous training should be provided to commissioners and arbitrators to promote consistency and fairness in combined proceedings. Drawing from South Africa's experience, flexibility to adjourn or separate proceedings where fairness may be compromised should be introduced to balance efficiency with due process and to minimize inconsistent decision-making.

Expanding Awareness and Institutional Acceptance of Med-Arb

Awareness of Med-Arb should be expanded among employees, employers, trade unions, and judges. Increasing understanding among these groups would promote confidence, voluntary participation, and uniform application of Med-Arb across Tanzania's labour dispute resolution system. Judicial awareness, in particular, would reinforce the recognition and enforceability of Med-Arb outcomes

Conclusion

The comparative examination of Tanzania's Med-Arb framework and South Africa's Con-Arb model highlights both shared goals and differing procedural sophistication in labour dispute resolution. Both

systems aim to expedite disputes, reduce costs, and promote industrial harmony, but Tanzania's Med-Arb under Rule 18 of the Labour Institutions (Mediation and Arbitration) Rules, G.N. No. 64 of 2007, lacks clarity on neutrality, party consent, objection mechanisms, and challenges to awards, undermining procedural legitimacy. In contrast, South Africa's Con-Arb, governed by section 191(5A) of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 and Rule 17 of the CCMA Rules, provides a clearer framework that balances efficiency with fairness through defined procedures and written objection rights. Strengthening Tanzania's legal provisions by incorporating lessons from South Africa could improve both the speed and fairness of labour dispute resolution.

Reference

Statutes

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- 2) The Labour Institutions Act, [Cap 300 R.E. 2023]

Subsidiary Legislation from Tanzania

- 1) The Labour Laws (Amendments), Act No. 4 of 2025
- 2) The Labour Institution (Mediation and Arbitration) Rules, G.N. No. 64 of 2007

Principal Legislation from South Africa

- 1) Labour Relations Act, Act No. 66 of 1995

Subsidiary Legislation from South Africa

- 1) Rules for the Conduct of Proceedings before the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, GN R3318 in GG 48445 of 21 April 2023

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