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# ABBREVIATIONS

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data
ACSS	Africa Centre for Strategic Studies
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
ADP	Amhara Democratic Party
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
APD	Academy for Peace and Development
APSA	Africa Peace and Security Architecture
AU	African Union
BoLSA	Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs
CEA	Community Economic Activities
CEMAC	Central African Monetary Community
CIMC	Climate-Induced Multistakeholder Collaboration
CO <sup>2</sup>	Carbon Dioxide
CTA	Climate-Triggered Adaptation
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAC	East African Community
EACRF	East African Community Regional Force
EAPCCO	East African Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECS	Environmental Conflict Stressors
ENDF	Ethiopia National Defence Forces
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front

EPRDF	Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
EU	European Union
EWCS	Early Warning Conflict Systems
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDLR	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda
FNL	National Liberation Forces
FPB	Popular Forces of Burundi
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
GSIR	Reference to migration studies (2017)
GTI	Global Terrorism Index
HIS	Humanitarian Innovative Solutions
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IFFs	Illicit Financial Flows
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
KDF	Kenya Defence Forces
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
M23	March 23 Movement
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
MoDs	Ministries of Defence
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODP	Oromo Democratic Party

OFAC	Central African Forestry Observatory
PCRS	Pastoral Community Resource Sharing
PSF	Puntland Regional Security Forces
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
REC	Regional Economic Community
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
RSCT	Regional Security Complex Theory
SADC	Southern African Development Community's
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SAMIDRC	Mission in the DRC
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
SIHA	Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa
SNM	Somali National Movement
SSC	Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn
TDF	Tigray Defence Forces
TOC	Transnational Organised Crime
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UFEFCF	United Front of Ethiopians Federalist and Confederalist Forces
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNFCCC	Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States of America
VBIED	Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices
WACAP	West African Network of Prosecutors and Central Authorities
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
X	Formerly known as Twitter



# EDITORIAL

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As the Africa Amani Journal (AAJ) celebrates its 10th anniversary, we are proud to present this special edition, "Emerging Peace and Security Issues in Africa." This issue reflects the journal's enduring commitment to promoting critical scholarship and advancing practical solutions for peace and security on the African continent. The thematic focus on emerging challenges aligns with the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the security landscape in Africa, ensuring that the articles provide timely and impactful insights.

The contributors to this edition come from diverse academic and professional backgrounds, reflecting a rich tapestry of perspectives. Their work engages with pressing topics such as climate-induced conflicts, transnational organised crime, artificial intelligence in warfare, and regional peace processes. These themes underscore the complexity of the challenges we face, as well as the opportunities for innovative and collaborative solutions. Among the standout contributions are articles that explore Armed conflict in the region by Gideon Thoar, and the role of climate-responsive security sector reforms by Dr Sitawa, offering a critical lens on the African Union's policy frameworks. Equally significant are discussions on human trafficking in Eastern Africa by

Margaret Namirembe, which shed light on the intersection of transnational crime and local vulnerabilities. By addressing the security-migration nexus by Prof Yvan Yenda and the involvement of armed groups like Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab by Dr Luchetu Likaka, the journal provides both a macro and micro analysis of Africa's security challenges. In addition, Dr E. Kibe and Sekou addressed issues of Artificial Intelligence and how it has revolutionised the aspect of global security, redefining regional and national security. In this special edition, Dr.Fatuma highlights the indispensable contributions of youth in peacebuilding processes with a focus on Somali Youth. Youth-driven initiatives are emphasized as critical to fostering sustainable peace. These discussions reflect ongoing shifts in peace and

**As an editorial team, our objective for this special edition is twofold: to amplify the voices of African scholars and practitioners and to bridge the gap between research and practice.**

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security discourses, moving towards inclusivity and equitable representation in policy and practice.

As an editorial team, our objective for this special edition is twofold: to amplify the voices of African scholars and practitioners and to bridge the gap between research and practice. Each article is grounded in rigorous analysis while maintaining relevance to policymakers and practitioners working on the frontlines of peace and security in Africa.

We extend our deepest thanks to the contributors for their dedication and to the reviewers for their invaluable insights in shaping this edition. As AAJ continues to grow, we remain steadfast in our mission to serve as a hub for cutting-edge research and dialogue in peace support training, research, and education.

We hope this special edition will inspire further research, inform effective policy development, and foster collaborative action toward achieving a peaceful and secure Africa.



**Dr Emily Okuto (PhD)**

Chief Editor

Africa Amani Journal

## DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

**A**s we commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Africa Amani Journal (AAJ), it is with great pride that I introduce this special edition titled "Emerging Peace and Security Issues in Africa." Over the past decade, AAJ has firmly established itself as a critical platform for fostering dialogue, research, and policy engagement on peace and security in Africa. This milestone edition reflects our commitment to advancing understanding and offering solutions to the dynamic challenges facing the continent.

The theme of this special edition is both timely and significant. Africa stands at a pivotal moment, confronted with emerging security threats that are complex and multifaceted. Climate-induced resource scarcity, transnational organised crime, the proliferation of armed groups, and the disruptive potential of artificial intelligence in warfare are reshaping the landscape of peace and security. Additionally, the enduring challenges of migration, displacement, and regional conflicts underscore the need for innovative approaches to peacebuilding and governance. This edition delves into these issues, providing nuanced analyses and evidence-based insights.

We are privileged to present a diverse array of articles from scholars and practitioners across Africa and beyond. Among these, the exploration of climate-induced deprivations in Northern Kenya and the African Union's security sector reforms offer critical reflections on the intersection of environmental change and security. Similarly, case studies on transnational organised crime and the regional dynamics of peace processes shed light on the continent's interconnected challenges. The comparative analysis of armed militancy, with a focus on Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, further enriches our understanding of the evolving tactics of violent extremism.

**At the heart of this special edition is the emphasis on inclusivity, particularly the role of women and youth in peace processes.**

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At the heart of this special edition is the emphasis on inclusivity, particularly the role of women and youth in peace processes. The Women, Peace, and Security framework and studies on youth participation in conflict resolution underscore the importance of gender-sensitive and participatory approaches in addressing Africa's security challenges. These perspectives align with (AAJ's) vision to promote sustainable and inclusive peace through evidence-based research and training.

As we reflect on a decade of achievement, we also look forward to the future with a renewed sense of purpose. AAJ remains dedicated to providing a platform for critical discourse, fostering collaborations between scholars, practitioners, and policymakers, and shaping policies that respond to the continent's evolving security landscape.

Finally, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the contributors of the AAJ special edition for their scholarly rigor, the peer reviewers and to the editorial team for their unwavering commitment to excellence. I am confident that this edition will inspire new ideas, inform policy, and ignite meaningful action towards a peaceful and secure Africa.



**Brigadier Joyce C. Sitienei, MBS, 'ndc' (K)**  
**Director, International Peace Support Training Centre**

# THE TIGRAY REGION'S ARMED CONFLICT AND ITS AFTERMATH

**Gideon Gatpan Thoar**

## **Abstract**

Since the fall of Ethiopia's communist regime in 1991, the country enjoyed relative peace and stability in Eastern Africa, buoyed by smooth political transitions and strong governance under leaders like Hailemariam Desalegn and Meles Zenawi. However, the devastating armed conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, erupting just three years into Abiy Ahmed's tenure as Prime Minister, disrupted this stability. This study examines the causes, actors, and impacts of the Tigray conflict, employing desktop research and grounded in conflict triangle theory. The analysis highlights how longstanding political mistrust between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)—exacerbated by historical tensions with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF)—created conditions ripe for conflict. These tensions were compounded by Ethiopia's ethno-federal governance structure and the ongoing dispute with Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The findings reveal that the conflict attracted regional and international actors, including Eritrea, Egypt, and global powers, whose competing interests intensified the violence. The consequences were dire: widespread loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, massive displacement, and severe human rights abuses, including sexual violence and psychological trauma. Additionally, the war devastated health and education systems and livelihoods. This study underscores the urgent need for inclusive governance, regional cooperation, and comprehensive peacebuilding initiatives to address Ethiopia's structural challenges and mitigate future conflicts.

**Key Words:** Political transitions; armed conflict; political differences; ethno-federal system

# Introduction

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In early November 2020, Ethiopia once again retracted from the path of peace and development to one of the most destructive armed conflicts in its northern region of Tigray (Pellet, 2021). After the fall of the Communist regime in 1991, Ethiopia had an opportunity to introduce political, economic, and social reforms in the country (Dercon, 2006). Upon the assumption of office in 2018, Abiy Ahmed, the incumbent Prime Minister of Ethiopia, continued to pursue more aggressive reforms (Abai, 2021). To achieve these reforms, Abiy's government first considered improving its diplomatic and economic relations with the neighbouring countries especially the countries in the coastal region (Adem et al., 2018). In this respect, the Prime Minister prioritised peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea (Desta, 2019). This move led to the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the two formerly animus nations (Addis et al., 2020).

Although Abiy intended to alleviate the barriers affecting trade in a landlocked Ethiopia, his efforts to bring peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea received fierce criticisms from the hardliners within the ruling coalition – the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) mainly by members of Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a constituent party of the EPRDF originating from the Tigray region who had objected Abiy's ascension to the position of Prime Minister in 2018 (Woldemariam, 2019). The peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia became the principal cause of mistrust and disagreement between Ethiopia's Federal Government and the Tigray Regional Government. This mistrust culminated in a violent armed conflict in the Tigray region (Abbink, 2021).

A good number of Tigray political elites within TPLF were still holding onto the idea of self-determination to mean secession from Ethiopia's nation-state. This was as opposed to the founding vision of TPLF in 1975 that aimed to achieve autonomy or self-rule for the people of Tigray within the federal democratic republic of Ethiopia (Berhe, 2004). These political elites from TPLF had wielded power and also accumulated material wealth during the time of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Hailemairan Desalegn (Gebregziabher, 2019). To create a pathway for political and economic reforms, Prime Minister Abiy had to relieve senior government officials some of their positions. Some of whom were arrested due to corruption charges (Dibu & Ahadu, 2020).

Introducing reforms became a new phenomenon for TPLF political elites, who had perceived Abiy as a greenhorn to the political architecture of EPRDF. They believed their influence, especially within the Tigray region, was inexorable (Geremew & Alamineh, 2021). This perception emboldened their stand to hold elections in the Tigray region despite



the federal government's policy not to conduct elections amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (Salemot & Getu, 2020). Prime Minister Abiy saw the TPFL oblivion as contemptuous of the federal government's policy on the containment of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, this led to a confrontation between the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray Regional Government in November 2020 (Assefa & Wami, 2023).

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study on the Tigray region's armed conflict and its aftermath is guided by Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle Theory, which provides a multidimensional framework for understanding conflict and promoting resolution. The theory identifies three interconnected dimensions of conflict: contradictions, attitudes, and behaviour. Contradictions, or the structural dimension, refer to systemic issues that create underlying tensions. In the Tigray context, these include historical political marginalization, inequitable resource distribution, and governance challenges within Ethiopia's federal system. These structural factors formed the basis of grievances that fueled the conflict. Attitudes, the cultural dimension, pertain to perceptions, emotions, and ideologies that sustain hostility. Ethnic narratives, historical grievances, and identity-based ideologies in Tigray exacerbated mistrust and animosity among the parties involved. Behaviour, the manifest dimension, encompasses the visible actions of the conflict, including violence, repression, and retaliation. The armed hostilities, marked by military confrontations and human rights violations, are direct manifestations of this dimension.

Galtung's theory asserts that sustainable peace requires addressing all three dimensions. Resolving contradictions through structural reforms, transforming attitudes to foster reconciliation, and changing behaviours to end violence are critical steps toward long-term stability. By applying this theory, the study provides a holistic understanding of the Tigray conflict, its causes, and its aftermath. It highlights the need for a multidimensional approach to conflict resolution, offering insights into the interventions necessary for achieving sustainable peace in the region.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a desktop research approach to examine the armed conflict in the Tigray region and its aftermath. Desktop research, or secondary research, involves systematically collecting, reviewing, and synthesizing existing data and literature. This methodology was selected for its effectiveness in providing a comprehensive understanding of computerizing a wide range of documented sources.

Data for this study was collected from diverse and reputable secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic publications, reports from international organisations such as the United Nations and the African Union, as well as policy briefs, think tank analyses and credible news media. The research focused on the period from 2020, when the conflict began, to the most recent developments in 2024. The selection

of sources prioritized relevance, credibility, and their ability to address the multifaceted aspects of the conflict and its aftermath.

The data analysis employed qualitative content analysis to identify patterns, themes, and key insights from the literature. This process involved categorizing data into key themes, such as the causes of the conflict, humanitarian consequences, international interventions, and post-conflict recovery efforts. Perspectives from various stakeholders, including local actors, regional powers, and international entities, were compared to ensure a balanced and nuanced understanding. Additionally, the reliability and potential biases of sources were critically assessed to maintain the objectivity of the findings.

Ethical considerations were integral to the research process. The study adhered to ethical research practices by respecting intellectual property rights and ensuring that all sources were properly cited. Care was taken to present findings objectively, avoiding any misrepresentation or selective use of data.

Despite its strengths, this methodology has certain limitations. As desktop research relies exclusively on secondary data, it is constrained by the availability and quality of existing sources. The absence of primary data collection may exclude the perspectives of marginalized groups directly affected by the conflict. Moreover, the rapidly changing dynamics of the Tigray conflict may render some information outdated or incomplete.

## **Findings**

### **The Causes of the Ethiopian-Tigray Armed Conflict**

Ethiopia experienced a protracted conflict between the northern regions and the central government particularly under the nobility rule and the Derg administration (Zaragoza, 2022). The Tigray region in particular, has been known as the cradle of civilization in Ethiopia (Abbay, 2022). This legacy, followed by successive control of power through nobilities, influenced the thinking of the Tigrayan people, who claim to understand the state system better than other communities in Ethiopia (Ferede & Haile, 2017). The Amhara region also became conversant with the workings of state structures, especially after the shift of power from Tigray to the Amhara region in the 1970s (Young, 1996). After the fall of the Derg regime in 1991, the EPRDF government adopted an ethno-federal system of government with tribes as regional states but having limited participation in decision-making (Ishiyama, 2023). This choice of the system of governance was a project of TPLF-led EPRDF government. Due to TPLF's influence and control of the EPRDF government, the Tigray region became the center of power in Ethiopia's politics (Aidi, 2021).

Political elites from Tigray within the EPRDF coalition could influence government decisions even in other regional states (Gebregziabher, 2019a). The TPLF-dominated regime was characterized by rampant corruption, excessive brutality, human rights

abuses, and the exclusion of other regions in decision-making (Lyons, 2021). This norm became the primary source of dissatisfaction and dissent among the Ethiopians (Muhumed, 2021). Though the Amhara region was part of the EPRDF coalition, its influence in government was overshadowed by that of the assertive TPLF (Arriola & Lyons, 2016). The rise of Abiy Ahmed to the premiership in 2018 was an unprecedented phenomenon for the TPLF political elites, who saw his political, economic, and security reforms as attempts to relegate them from the center of power and decision-making (Shoa & Gizaw, 2021). This perception fueled their resistance to all aspects of Abiy's reforms, leading to the outbreak of war in the Tigray region in November 2020 (Hurley, 2023).

Fundamental causes of protracted conflict in Ethiopia include poverty, ethnic nationalism, ethnic federalism, and lack of elite consensus on national issues. These include the national language, national flag, ownership of the national capital, and the federal structure (Tefera & Castro, 2016). Other causes of the Ethiopian-Tigray conflict include power struggle, land ownership, tribal differences, and weak state institutions (Mengistu, 2015). In all these conflicts, both Amharic, Tigrinya, Afan, Somali, and Oromo have been known for their cultural, political, and language hegemony in Ethiopia (Getachew & Derib, 2006). The Tigray region, in particular, has been seen as culturally and politically dominant in Ethiopia. This can be traced back to the era of the Aksumite Kingdom, which dominated political power for centuries before the power shifted to the Amhara region (Sulas. This has been the source of long-existing historical political and social antagonism between the Amhara and Tigray regions. Other historical conflicts are based on religion, region, nationality, or a combination of all these factors. The Ethiopian-Tigray violent conflict, however, broke out as a crisis of identity and the choice of a system of governance (Tronvoll, 2022).

The Prosperity Party inherited an Ethno-federal system of governance from the EPRDF government, where political formations in Ethiopia were based on ethnicity as regional states or a combination of a few (Fisher & Gebrewahd, 2019). Under the EPRDF regime, the Federal Government's business was largely influenced by TPLF political elites and their close allies who dominated the political landscape and economic and security sectors (Blanchard, 2020). TPLF elites became overconfident, a reality that they thought would keep them on par with the new regime under Abiy. It did not go well with their intention. They vehemently objected to Abiy's political, economic, and security reforms and all subsequent actions by the federal government including the re-establishment of diplomatic ties with Eritrea (Abdulkadr & Neszmelyi, 2021). Fiseha (2023) argues that after rising to power, Abiy became an authoritarian centrist who wanted to consolidate power by all means regardless of the reaction of other political constituencies in Ethiopia. The Tigray politicians perceived this as a move by Abiy to galvanize political support from the opponents of Tigray political elites (Hagmann, et al., 2019). Thus, the inevitable conflict between TPLF and Prosperity Party that resulted in the devastating war in the Tigray region.

Ethiopia's history of monarchy and dictatorship has contributed to weak state institutions and political systems (Gebeyehu, 1990). This experience has been exploited by the political elites in Ethiopia who have succeeded in their quest to minimize public participation in federal politics (Belay & Ndiaye, 2020). The lack of political awareness within the Ethiopian society has opened ways for political elites to manipulate public opinion in exercising their sovereign powers to the advantage of a few (Kassa, 2015). The effect is a lack of effective and responsive state institutions. The principal cause of the conflict between the Tigray region and Ethiopia's federal government was the introduction of political, economic, and security reforms by Abiy's government (Lie & Mesfin, 2018). This was also exacerbated by counter-diplomacy against Ethiopia by other countries, including Egypt, Sudan, and Eritrea, aiming to secure their national interests (Siyum, 2021).

Makonye (2022) argues that some short-term causes of the militarization conflict include the dilemma on the choice of system of governance, ethnic divisions, power struggle between TPLF and Prosperity Party, militarization of ethnic militia, and negative propaganda by regional ethnic leaders. These are coupled with uncertain state structures and long-term mistrust between the federal government and regional states in Northern Ethiopia (Thomas, 2023). Other immediate causes relate to the retaliatory reactions by marginalized regional states and constituent parties of EPRDF such as the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), and Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) against the TPLF monopoly of power and resources (Jima, 2023). Tension also rose after the announcement of the postponement of elections. Relations between Abiy's government and the Tigray people have deteriorated even during the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020 (Matlosa, 2021).

The postponement of the August 2020 elections did not go well with the Tigray politicians both in the federal government and regional government (Mengie, 2021). They had expected to use their accumulated wealth to influence the outcomes of elections in favour of a candidate of their choice (Gebregziabher & Hout, 2018). Abiy never heeded pressure from TPLF elites, instead, he became more strategic and consistent in ensuring the implementation of his reform agenda (Gedamu, 2019). The TPLF elites were left with no other options other than to confront Abiy's government by attacking the positions of Ethiopia National Defence Forces (ENDF) in the Tigray region on 3 November 2020 (Labzaé, 2022). On the 4th of November 2020, the Prime Minister took the responsibility to order the law enforcement agencies to use the necessary force to restore law and order in the Tigray region (Baune). Hence, the execution of the deadly armed conflict in the Tigray region. Bedaso (2021) argues that the Ethiopian-Tigray conflict was a war of vision between Pan-Ethiopians and multi-nation structures in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's federalism established ethno-federal structures and ethnolinguistic lines (Dibu & Ahadu, 2020). Ethnic federalism was the basis for political identities and structures that created sharp divisions among the political classes in their respective regions (Abbink, 2011). Though the framers of the 1994 constitution intended to encourage participation

in federal governance in Ethiopia, its implementation continues to be challenged by members of TPLF who advocate and mobilise for secession, or else, they must remain dominant in federal politics (Abbink, 2006).

Some TPLF promote a centrist viewpoint on the governance system in Ethiopia. They argue that Ethiopia is troubled by structural conflict caused by the 1994 ethno-federal constitution that encourages the struggle for supremacy along ethnic lines and ethnic political formations (Halabo, 2019). However, these counterarguments make no significant meaning in avoiding conflict in Ethiopia based on Mamdani's (2019) perspective, which argues that Ethiopia is at a crossroads because neither the 1974 nor the 1994 constitution provides a way forward to resolving the protracted conflict.

Accordingly, Yusuf (2019) argues that the main cause of violent conflict in Ethiopia is the rise of militants coupled with competing ethno-nationalism in the context of fragile state and party institutions. Ethiopia's political institutions have been weaker due to the influence of authoritarian rule (1930-1974) and also the military dictatorship under Mengistu Hailemariam from 1974 to 1991. In 1991, the EPRDF government restructured state and political parties. However, this restructuring was based on ethnic units. Ethnic nationalism became the basis for ethnic militants to be mobilised before the outbreak of the war in the Tigray region. Mwansa and Simbila (2022) argue that though the war in the Tigray region occurred due to severe political differences and the power struggle between the TPLF and the federal government of Ethiopia, it was exacerbated by existing historical, economic, cultural, and social factors.

Other causes of conflict in the Tigray region are linked to external interests. Egypt's interest in the Nile Waters became apparent during the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) (Obengo, 2016). The construction of GERD has brought severe differences between Egypt and Ethiopia. Nile Waters is a matter of national security in Egypt due to its natural geographical position in Africa and the demand for freshwater (Yihdego, et al., 2017). Since the beginning of the GERD construction, Egypt has been using its strategic location to influence the United States and its allies to pressure Ethiopia to stop the construction of the Dam (Mohyeldeen, 2021). It also mobilised some members of the Arab League to support its position against the construction of GERD. Indeed most Arab nations heeded to Egypt's request and supported its positions (Tsega, 2017).

The United States considers Egypt a strategic and important ally to protect its interest in the Middle East, particularly the State of Israel. On one occasion, President Donald Trump of the United States recklessly pronounced to the Sudan's Prime Minister that Egypt could bomb the dam (Debisa, 2021). This statement had a significant impact on the conflict. It motivated Egypt to use soft power to derail the Dam's construction. However, it has also aggressed Ethiopia and hardened its position to operationalise the dam as part of its ambitious agenda to achieve economic transformation (Gibson, 2023).

Tigray region became an area of concern for the federal government of Ethiopia months before the war due to the presence of large Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) at the border (Ebaidalla, 2023). This was because of the geographical position of Tigray and its relations with Sudan and Egypt (Manek & Omer, 2020). In the months preceding the war, SAF showed an unusual presence along the northern border with Ethiopia leading to border disputes, especially at the time when Egypt was conducting high-level lobbying amongst its allies against the operationalisation of the dam (Jamie, 2022). As a result, Ethiopia became more suspicious and concerned about the activities of Sudan and Egypt in Tigray region (Analytica, 2021).

Apart from Sudan, other Nile Basin countries never declared their position regarding the conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia over the construction and management of GERD (Shay, 2022). They were either caught in between the interests of their Western allies and their interest or things were moving faster between the Tigray region and the federal government of Ethiopia (Obengo, 2016). Among the Nile Basin countries, Ethiopia found itself isolated in dealing with the situation surrounding the construction and management of GERD (Wolde, 2018). However, despite all these challenges, Ethiopia was determined to achieve its development objectives by constructing the Dam while looking at Egypt's hegemony on the Nile Waters as an outcome of colonial legacy that gave great advantage to Egypt over other Nile Basin countries (Gebreluel, 2014).

### **The Actors in the Ethiopian-Tigray Armed Conflict**

The Ethiopian-Tigray conflict involved numerous internal and external actors, with complex motivations and dynamics. Internally, the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) and Amhara Defence Forces fought against the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) and other groups under the United Front of Ethiopian Federalist and Confederalist Forces (UFEFCF), whose shared goal was to unseat Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (Cannon, 2022). Political organizations, including the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and its affiliates, were divided, with some supporting the federal government and others siding with the Tigray regional state (Meester et al., 2022).

Externally, countries such as Eritrea, Russia, China, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, and the United Kingdom, along with organizations like the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU), played critical roles. Eritrea supported Ethiopia militarily, while Russia provided naval training and maintained strategic partnerships. Türkiye, the UAE, and China supplied munitions and drones to aid Ethiopia, while Western nations pressured the government to observe a ceasefire and adhere to international humanitarian law (Kapur, 2022; Belay & Ndiaye, 2020; Abbink, 2021). Efforts by the United States and EU to sanction conflict perpetrators through the UN were blocked by Russia and China, which argued for internal resolution (Hassan & Hamad, 2023).

The AU engaged actors in peace efforts but faced challenges due to competing global interests and power dynamics. Ethiopia's strategic location, the Grand Ethiopian



Renaissance Dam (GERD), and Nile Basin politics attracted global attention. Egypt and Sudan opposed Ethiopia's GERD project, citing potential impacts on Nile water flow, while Ethiopia emphasized its benefits for regional development and energy access (Salman, 2018; Prantner & Al-Naggar, 2022). This geopolitical contest complicated conflict resolution and deepened grievances in the region (Tadese, 2020).

The conflict caused immense humanitarian and social disruptions. Civilians faced displacement, starvation, and abuse, with the UNHCR, OCHA, and other agencies providing critical support (Glaser et al., 2023). However, access was hindered by military restrictions. Infrastructure, especially schools, suffered heavily, with many destroyed and children unable to attend classes (Tekulu et al., 2023). Smallholder farmers lost crops, livestock, and tools, further destabilizing the economy.

The role of digital technology and social media was limited, as Ethiopia's authoritarian federalism imposed restrictions on internet access and free speech (Weigele & Brandt, 2022). Prime Minister Abiy had initially attempted reforms, such as increasing mobile networks and releasing political prisoners, but growing tensions led to internet shutdowns and crackdowns on dissent (Gagliardone & Brhane, 2021).

Despite AU frameworks for peace and conflict resolution, the organization's response to the Ethiopian-Tigray war exposed gaps in its intervention capacity, institutional weaknesses, and political challenges. Its reliance on external funding from partners such as the UN, EU, and China also affected its neutrality and decisiveness (Ojakorotu & Erameh, 2022).

Lastly, allegations of bias in international interventions emerged, with some accusing the UN and other agencies of discriminatory practices in their reporting on conflict victims, particularly in Amhara and Afar regions (Damtew & Mitiku, 2022). These critiques highlight the complexity of addressing such conflicts, where global and regional interests intersect with local grievances, complicating peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts.

The Ethiopian-Tigray conflict underscores the need for comprehensive approaches that address both immediate humanitarian needs and long-term structural and geopolitical issues. Regional cooperation, supported by fair and inclusive international intervention, is essential for sustainable peace in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

### **The Impact of the Ethiopian-Tigray Armed Conflict**

The conflict in the Tigray region has resulted in a humanitarian crisis marked by the killing of over 3,097 civilians, including 23 humanitarian workers, widespread displacement, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and restricted humanitarian access (Annys et al., 2021). Relations between the Tigray people and Ethiopia's federal government have deteriorated significantly, requiring delicate reconciliation efforts in the future (Ezugwu & Duruji, 2023).

This conflict, one of the most destructive in modern times, caused unprecedented devastation, including starvation among displaced persons and refugees, the collapse of health services, looting, sexual violence, and psychological trauma, particularly affecting women and girls (Gesese et al., 2021). Civilians fleeing to other regions or Sudan faced sexual violence and abuse from militia forces aligned with the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), amounting to human rights violations (Istratii, 2021).

International humanitarian organizations expressed alarm over the federal government's intransigence and the lack of independent investigations into the conflict's impacts (Weldemichel, 2022; Bedaso, 2021). The education sector was severely affected, with 57.1% of schools damaged and 50.3% of students unable to attend classes (Tekulu et al., 2023). Smallholder farmers also suffered, with 81% losing crops and 75% losing livestock.

The conflict inflicted physical, institutional, and long-term damage, including the proliferation of small arms (Ibreck & de Waal, 2022). Both the ENDF and Eritrean Defence Forces committed atrocities potentially amounting to war crimes, while the TPLF also perpetrated summary killings, sexual violence, and looting (Amhara, 2022). Comprehensive programs are urgently needed to address the aftermath and rebuild affected communities.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Tigray conflict is deeply rooted in the longstanding antagonism between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which has significantly influenced Ethiopia-Eritrea relations (Clapham, 2002). The TPLF has consistently perceived any Ethiopian overtures to Eritrea as a strategic manoeuvre to undermine its interests, reflecting a deep-seated distrust stemming from historical grievances (Young, 2019). This perception has fostered a culture of resistance within Tigray, making military solutions counterproductive (Kenenisa, 2021). Addressing this conflict necessitates a nuanced understanding of these historical tensions and the development of alternative conflict resolution strategies.

Ethiopia as a country must revisit the choices of the system of governance. Lessons from the existing ethno-federal system of governance have indicated a serious decline in intra-regional state relations and federal-regional state relations leading to violent conflict and wars. Ethno-federalism does not only destroy citizen's patriotism, it also affects the development and functioning of political institutions in the country. It is impossible to expect political stability and sustained economic and social progress in a country where political entities and structures are based on ethnic identities. Currently, Ethiopia is grappling with a crisis of identity, which often brings about protracted conflict with long-term effects, especially on the unity of the people.

The context of the armed conflict in the Tigray region has been largely political, it involves political actors within and outside Ethiopia. Many external actors who conducted

wartime diplomacy during the Ethiopian-Tigray armed conflict pursued their national self-interest. Taddele (2020) argues that external interest in the Ethiopian-Tigray armed conflict has complicated internal and external interventions to resolve the conflict. According to Shay (2020), the involvement of Eritrea and Egypt in the Ethiopian-Tigray conflict was one among many factors prolonging and widening the scope of the conflict in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian-Tigray conflict requires a regional strategy through the AU or the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to address internal and external factors that have frustrated efforts to bring peace to northern Ethiopia.


On humanitarian grounds, the Tigray conflict has inflicted heavy loss of civilian lives, loss of livelihood, massive displacement, human rights abuses, and infrastructural damage. Istratii (2021) underscores the widespread looting of civilian property by Federal Government militia, random killing of civilians, and increased levels of trauma among refugees and internally displaced persons. The Federal Government of Ethiopia has continued to deny an independent investigation into the conflict in Tigray. Bedengo (2021) posits that the lack of an independent investigation may deteriorate relations between Ethiopia and regional and international actors.

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# IMPACT OF GLOBAL CRIME NETWORKS ON NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY: A CASE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE EASTERN AFRICA

**Namirembe Margaret**

## **Abstract**

In the past two decades, there has been a growth in transnational organised crime, particularly human trafficking, not only in Africa but also globally. While transnational organised crime is considered an emerging threat continuously morphing, its impact on the political, social, economic, and security environment is not debatable. Against that background, this study examines the impact of human trafficking networks on national and international security in Africa, specifically in Eastern Africa. The study was guided by three key objectives: the enabling factors of human trafficking, available countermeasures and the impact of human trafficking networks on security in Eastern Africa. The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Data was collected using key informant interviews mainly from the security sector, agencies and representatives of non-governmental organisations engaged in the rehabilitation of previous perpetrators and victims. In addition, in-depth interviews were used to collect information from perpetrators of human trafficking. Participants in the study were selected using targeted/purposive sampling with respondent-driven techniques. Research findings indicate that human trafficking networks in Africa are partly responsible for the continued armed conflicts as the networks engage in weapons proliferation and money laundering while others finance activities of terror and rebel groups. It was also established that crime networks in Eastern Africa are interlinked with global networks, especially in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, fuelling the surge in organ harvesting and trafficking.

**Key words:** human trafficking, crime networks, criminality, crime

# Introduction

According to the United Nation's (UN) Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Human trafficking is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons employing threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, the abuse of power, or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Human trafficking can also be defined as a series of sequential event-related stages: recruitment, travel and transit, exploitation, and integration of persons (Kiss and Zimmerman, 2019). Human trafficking entails the recruiting, transporting, or harbouring of a person by means of force, fraud, coercion, or other threats for the purposes of exploiting that person (Shinkle, 2017).

Global data indicates that human trafficking is one of the fastest emerging security threats. However, the lack of a clear definition of human trafficking has, to some extent, hindered the general understanding of the threat and, consequently, efforts geared towards mitigating the vice. This concern is also highlighted by McAlpine, Hossain and Zimmerman (2016), who highlighted that the poor definitional clarity of trafficking-related terminology was one of the causes of weak identification and measurement of exploitation, as well as disjointed programming in response to the problem.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report of 2022 places sexual exploitation as the most common form of human trafficking at 79% followed by forced labour at 18%. According to the report, the victims of sexual exploitation were predominantly women and girls although women made up the largest portion of human traffickers in at least 30% of the countries which provided information on the gender of traffickers. This reveals a growing trend in human trafficking compared to the UNODC report on trafficking in persons (2012) which indicated that as of 2012, 36–62% of the 20.9 million people who are estimated to be in situations of forced labour or victims of human trafficking were trafficked for sexual exploitation. As of 2024, an estimated 27 million people are exploited for labour, services, and commercial sex (US report on trafficking in persons, 2024).

In Eastern Africa, the major pull factors of human trafficking are mainly cheap labour on large farms or industries, sexual exploitation and more recently, a surge in organs harvesting. This is echoed by Bigio & Vogelstein (2019) who assert that victims of human trafficking could be sexually exploited, forced to donate their organs, forced to work, and forcefully recruited into armed groups. For instance, in Somalia's semi-autonomous Puntland state, authorities arrested Ethiopian nationals who had been lured into joining the Islamic State's Somalia branch under the guise of employment.

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Similarly, according to a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), as of 2016, forced labour generated about USD150 billion in annual profits and 24.9 million people are involved in forced labour (ILO, 2017). The report further noted that women and girls are affected by the commercial sex industry and forced labour, accounting for 99% and 58%, respectively.

In Uganda, for instance, the Police Annual Crime Report (2018) indicated that in 2018, there were 286 reports involving 650 registered victims of trafficking in persons compared to 177 reports involving 355 victims in 2017. Similarly, as of 2020, 1,476 Ugandans were trafficked, while in 2023, 510 cases of child trafficking were reported compared to 77 cases in 2019 (Uganda Police Crime Report, 2023). This points to an increase in human trafficking incidents for sexual exploitation. However, there are still gaps as far as data regarding persons trafficked for the sole purpose of organ harvesting is concerned.

Human trafficking is fuelled by the existence of criminal networks in and out of the Eastern Africa region and the huge benefits that accrue to the traffickers. Oftentimes, the relationship between the victim and the trafficker may or may not cease after the victim has been transported, and in many cases, the victim may be passed from one trafficker to another until they arrive at a pre-determined destination.

The Eastern Africa region is currently grappling with a number of emerging security threats, including transnational organised crime whose impact on the political, social, economic and security environment is not debatable. Criminal networks span the whole of Africa and the neighbouring continents, especially the Middle East, Asia and Europe. In the past decade, terror groups have been exploiting transnational organised crime networks to obtain recruits and raise funds crucial to sustaining their operations.

Consequently, national governments and international bodies have designed a number of measures, namely profiling of existing transnational organised networks in the region for pre-emptive measures, sensitisation of the netizens, establishment of anti-human trafficking laws, capacity building and innovation to respond to 'new' and complex forms of contemporary human trafficking aimed at mitigating the threat of human trafficking. The measures were boosted by the adoption of the United Nations (UN) resolution 55(25) which focuses on prevention and combating of trafficking in persons. In Eastern Africa, regional blocks have been established by member countries to enhance the fight against human trafficking. Similarly, countries have invested in research and designed measures aimed at building the resilience of nationals to human trafficking schemes (Norah, 2019; Marchand, Reinold and Dias e Silva, 2017).

Despite all the measures that have been undertaken, literature indicates that there is an increase in cases of human trafficking, especially for organ harvesting. Human trafficking networks are growingly being exploited by terror groups to obtain recruits under the guise of employment opportunities while proceeds of human trafficking are used to fuel conflict in the Eastern Africa region. There are also persistent gaps, including social-economic vulnerabilities, lack of clarity on the identity and composition of criminal networks, growth in the consumption of digital services in the region and ignorance by the netizens. It is against this background, therefore, that this research seeks to examine the dynamics behind the growth in human trafficking and propose possible measures that relevant stakeholders can undertake to curtail the threat.

**Despite all the measures that have been undertaken, literature indicates that there is an increase in cases of human trafficking, especially for organ harvesting. Human trafficking networks are growingly being exploited by terror groups to obtain recruits under the guise of employment opportunities while proceeds of human trafficking are used to fuel conflict in the Eastern Africa region.**

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### **Theoretical underpinnings**

In trying to unpack the impact of human trafficking, this study was based on the Rational Choice Theory (RCT), which is attributed to Adam Smith (1776). According to RCT, individual decisions are a result of a cost-benefit analysis, and if the benefits outweigh the costs, then the individual will participate. It further suggests that human beings make their decisions and choices by keeping their self-interest a priority. The theory avers that an individual will engage in a crime - human trafficking if they are presented with an opportunity where there is a benefit and little likelihood of being apprehended (Glen & Lawrence, 2020). This, therefore, implies that human traffickers often encourage their targets with presumed benefits, which in most



cases are depicted to be better than their prevailing situations, thus making eventual victims conceptualise the end they so desire and decide on the best possible courses of action that lead to the desired end.

RCT further holds that the occurrence of crime, in this case human trafficking is premised on the presence of a suitable target, a motivated offender and the absence of guardianship (Cohen & Felson, 1979). This implies that whereas criminal networks will identify targets based on the perceived benefits, which in most cases are financial, the perpetrators and offenders alike participate as a result of ignorance.

Besides, working on the principle of agency, according to RCT, agents are said to be rational if they reflect a relationship of superiority, inferiority, or indifference among all pairs that choices and are logically ordered; that is, they do not exhibit any cyclic inconsistencies (Amadae, 2003). As a result of consistency in their dealings, victims of human trafficking more often do not realise that they are being sucked into a net of human traffickers. Traffickers often manipulate an individual's considerations that would be pertinent to the envisaged decision (including attitudes toward risk, resentment, sympathy, envy, loyalty, love, and a sense of fairness) to achieve their goal. The Rational Choice Theory is largely based on three larger concepts, namely: - rational individuals, self-interest and the invisible hand. Therefore, human traffickers, who are presumed to have a strong profit motive, operate in their environment and ultimately contribute to the best interest of their networks or groups. 09,.

However, one of the limitations of the RCT is that it does not take into account decisions made by individuals under duress or the influence of social norms and situational factors as well as the how an individual's ethics and values might influence individual decisions. Whereas scholars have criticised the RCT for its unrealistic assumptions, lack of empirical testing, and limited empirical validity (Green & Shapiro, 1994; Goldthorpe, 2000), is of significant importance to this study.

To mitigate the identified limitations of the RCT, the study also considers the General Theory of Crime (GTC), which expounds on the impact of individual self-control. According to the theory, lack of self-control is seen as the main cause of crime, in this case, human trafficking. Moreover, empirical studies, including meta-analysis, have confirmed that individual self-control is, in fact, a strong predictor of crime when compared to a range of factors at various levels of analysis. However, the GTC was criticised by Akers (1991) for not defining self-control and the tendency toward criminal behaviour separately.

## **Methodology**

This study employed phenomenology and case study designs with a qualitative research approach, thus allowing investigation from both the analytical and descriptive perspectives and consequently enabling researchers to combine theory generation and hypothesis testing within a single study (Jogulu & Pansiri, 2011). Non-random sampling



techniques were used to determine the population size; the study specifically used the respondent-driven sampling technique to identify former victims and purposive sampling to select study participants based on their experience, information-rich and individual knowledge regarding the study. In addition, the study reviewed previously published documents relevant to the subject matter. These included books, research papers, articles in Journals, legal documents and frameworks to further understand the concept of human trafficking.

Given the nature of the study, former victims of human trafficking and the security actors (particularly those engaged in anti-human trafficking), IT experts, journalists and lawyers were targeted as study participants. These were deemed ideal respondents given their lived experiences (Song et al., 2016) on why and what exactly transpires in the whole human trafficking process.

## Research findings

Research findings indicated that trafficking in persons is often facilitated by persons well known to the victim, including friends and relatives. It was also established that parents, especially of girl children, often participate in the trafficking of their children to become brides of leaders or male members of negative armed groups, including terror groups in the region. This was also re-echoed by Namirembe (2023), where a victim revealed that she had been transported to Eastern DRC to join ADF by her maternal aunt and sister, while another revealed that she was taken to ADF camps by her father before being married off to one of the commanders.

In addition, some of the interviewed former victims revealed that they were going through hard financial situations in their homes, which rendered them vulnerable to human traffickers. For instance, a male interviewee revealed that

*“owing to financial constraints at home and dire living conditions which forced him to drop out of school, he was lured by a lucrative employment opportunity only to end up in forced labour at arm.”*

The vulnerability, especially of children and youths, is exacerbated by the death of biological parents, who are often the sole providers. They often fall victim to sexual exploitation or forced labour either at the hands of relatives or human traffickers. For example, a rehabilitated female victim revealed that

*“following the death of my parents, I was taken in by my maternal aunt who later threw me out of the house to fend for myself. With no one to turn to, I fell prey to a sexual trafficking network in exchange for accommodation and food.”*

Transnational criminal networks span across borders in the region and neighbouring continents, especially the Middle East and Europe, exploiting the porousness along national borders to easily transit victims. This was partly attributed to the ease of travel across the border points in the region which do not necessarily require the possession of

passports for travel within the region. Research findings indicate that the Eastern Africa region continues to be a pool of potential victims, with Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania being exploited as the major transit points for trafficked persons. Trafficked persons from the region use designated routes that go through Sudan and Libya before crossing the sea to Europe or through Djibouti to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E).

Besides, criminal networks operate beyond national borders, often having agents in other countries for easy recruitment and transportation of the targets. According to Daghar (2020), a Ugandan girl was trafficked to Kenya by a Ugandan family friend. A Kenyan national then flew with her to Oman, where she was received at the airport by an Ethiopian national before being driven to her Omani employers. Figure 1 illustrates the human trafficking routes in the Eastern part of Africa.



**Figure 1:** Human trafficking routes in the region

Owing to the absence of parents to guide the children, children have been left to be brought up by their screens, both television and other mobile gadgets. Consequently, the increased online presence of minors has led to an increase, especially in online sexual exploitation. However, the online presence has also enabled cartel members to easily target potential victims through friendly requests before luring the person to travel out of the country or area of abode to an already intended destination. Unfortunately, with the majority of the preparatory activities being done virtually, security forces have faced an uphill task in identifying, preventing and, where possible, rescuing the trafficked persons. The same concern was emphasised in the UNODC (2022, 18), where it was

revealed that most victims identified in adjudicated cases are “self-rescued”, suggesting that proactive identification remains limited in scope and effectiveness – a review of court cases found that the majority of cases are brought to authorities by victims who manage to exit exploitation and come forward on their own.

Besides, human trafficking cartels are growingly using social media platforms to identify and lure targeted persons into their net. For example, a rescued victim of human trafficking interviewed from Uganda said:

“I was born and raised in Uganda. Having completed my advanced level, I could not continue with my studies due to the poor living conditions at home. While on Facebook, I was befriended by a male Mohamed\* who told me about high-paying jobs in Oman that did not require high levels of education. We communicated on Facebook and he paid for my passport fees. Later Mohamed sent me transport fare to Nairobi. At the Busia border, my crossing was aided by the bus operators. Once in Kenya, I was kept at a residence until I was given travel documents to Oman. I ended up offering forced labour to a family in Oman where I was constantly physically and sexually abused by my bosses.”

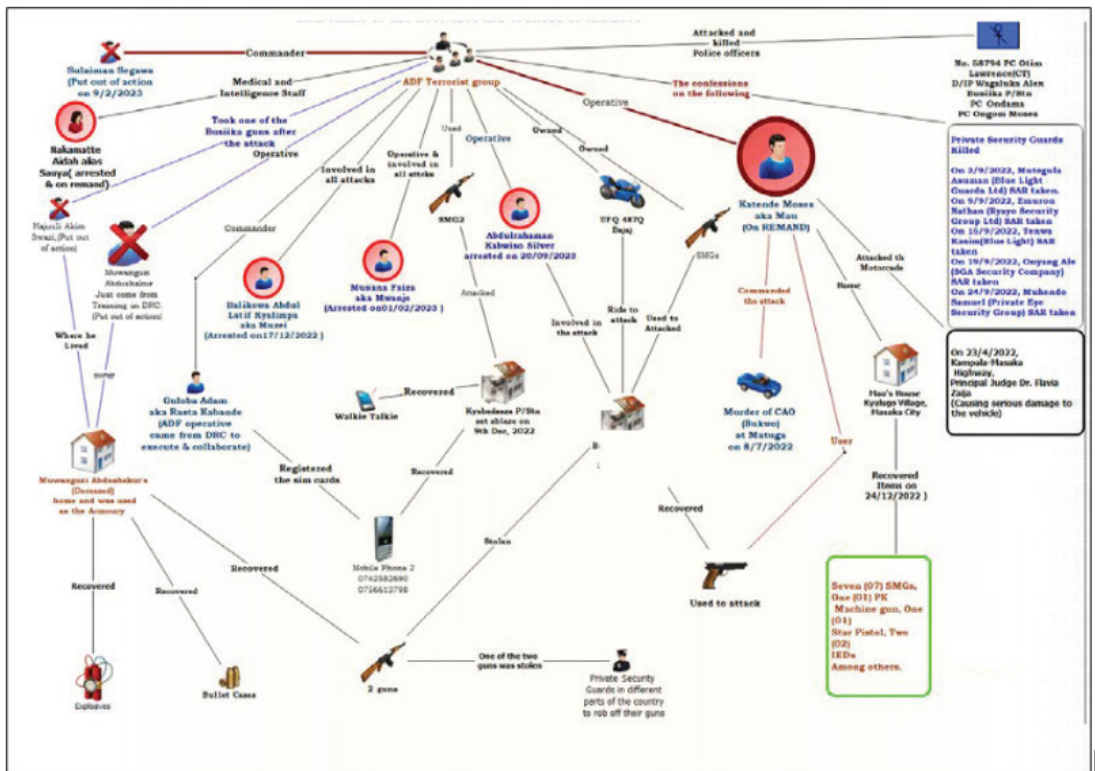
The above is just but one of the many forms through which human traffickers identify and covertly approach their targets, without necessarily leaving any traces. As reported in the 2024 US report on trafficking in persons, traffickers exploit online platforms to proactively and anonymously search for a specific type of individual who they believe is particularly susceptible to further their scheme. Human traffickers can also passively attract potential victims by posting online and waiting for a response. The report further argued that human traffickers use social media, online advertisements, websites, dating apps, and gaming platforms or fraudulent or deceptive duplications of such tools to hide their true identity through fake accounts and profiles while interacting with potential victims. Victims are often deceived with false promises of education, employment, housing, or romantic relationships only to lure them into labour, sex or organ harvesting trafficking situations.

According to the study, a number of trafficked persons had a desire to improve their livelihood and live a good life. With cartels conducting studies and playing on the desires of human beings, victims always lose a sense of rationality, with the desired end goal always replayed by the trafficker. According to Fleisher, Johnston, Alon, and Hunt (2008), this desire for a quick and easy payoff may be on the part of the individual who becomes a victim of trafficking, or it may be on the part of others who are exploiting them. Whereas a number of interviewed victims did not dream of accumulating wealth, their objective was to meet basic needs, pay off debts and to earn a lot of money quickly and easily (Kamala et al., 2001).

The high levels of corruption in abetting human trafficking, including at gazetted entry and exit points, as well as reported complicity of government officials, have continued

to fuel human trafficking in the region. The corruption tendencies of errant government elements inhibit the actions of law enforcement teams. Interviewees alluded that security officers and immigration officials, particularly at airports and border crossings, accepted bribes to facilitate trafficking crimes or to warn traffickers of impending operations and investigations. Besides, findings indicate that a number of identified labour recruitment companies that are suspected of human trafficking are linked to high-ranking government officials. For instance, in Uganda, in 2023, the Government prosecuted twelve (12) government officials, including police officers, prison officers, and public officials for suspected human trafficking crimes.

Research findings show that terror groups exploit networks within the region to recruit persons into their ranks. For instance, in Uganda, security forces disrupted a network of collaborators that was being used to recruit and transport recruits to the group's bases in Eastern DRC. The cell was based in Mityana District, Central Uganda. The study further established that criminal networks are also used by negative armed groups to procure and deliver weapons and ammunition, thus fueling armed conflict in the region (Uganda Police Crime report, 2023).



**Figure2:** Operations against the ADF cell in Katakala, Nsimbi Parish in Mityana District, Uganda.

**Source:** Uganda Police Crime report 2023

Besides, study findings established that human trafficking networks were also engaged in other transnational organised crimes, including money laundering, drug and wildlife trafficking and weapons proliferation, amongst others.

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With a surge in human trafficking, countries within the region are often placed on a watchlist which impacts free movement of nationals as well as trade.

For instance, as at December 2023, Uganda was categorized under Tier 2 for failing to meet the minimum standards in abetting human trafficking crimes.

National and international governments continue to emphasise the need for comprehensive approaches to curbing human trafficking; even then, raising of awareness remains the most common method in the region. However, in the Eastern Africa region, a number of countries have established by-laws to curb the threat. For instance, Uganda enacted the National Action Plan for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons in Uganda (2019-2024) to act as a guideline and road-map in efforts aimed at countering the menace of human trafficking.

Besides, countries have established anti-human trafficking units within security agencies. However, due to a lack of consolidated resources for the units, their efficiency in meeting the given mandate is often limited. For example, according to the US Trafficking in Persons Report (2024), the Uganda Police Force and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) maintained anti-trafficking units, with an establishment of a department of Anti-Trafficking Department. The department still grapples with resource constraints and is currently reliant on the Department of Sexual Offenses and Children Cases for funding. As Truong and Angels (2005, 6) emphasised “lack of resource deprives us of an opportunity to observe first-hand the application of best practices in the anti-human trafficking campaign in Africa”.

Research findings indicate that although some victims were luckily rescued, their perpetrators are often never apprehended. From interviews, a number of human trafficking victims revealed that they had to find individual means to escape from their captors. This resonates with the UNODC (2022) report on human trafficking, where it was emphasised that most victims were self-rescued, managing to escape and reach out to the authorities on their own initiative with very few rescue cases being as a result of initiatives by law enforcement, members of the community and civil society.

Research findings revealed that victims of human trafficking were ignorant about organisations that would be of help to them. A number of the interviewed persons only



hinted about possibly reporting to the nearest police station, where often times they ended up not receiving assistance. The challenge was also echoed by Klabbers, Hughes and Dank (2023: 14), whose research revealed that; “A major barrier was the lack of awareness of the organisations and resources available to them. Most participants were unable to list any or organisations that could help them by name. Among participants that had sought help, the police and healthcare professionals were the most frequently approached”.

Moreover, trafficked persons who were rescued preferred not to report to security agencies, especially in instances where the perpetrator was a relative, citing concerns about imprisoning their family members. In such cases, victims prefer to keep silent and try to move on with life. A similar concern was also echoed by Klabbers et al. (2023), who established that in incidents where the trafficker was a family member (mainly for those involved in forced labour and sexual exploitation), participants' loyalty and personal ties to the trafficker caused them to be conflicted about seeking help.

The existence of well-coordinated criminal rackets in the region, coupled with the snail pace of securing bilateral labour agreements with the targeted countries, has enabled human traffickers to exploit the gap to continuously lure unsuspecting victims into their traps under the guise of employment opportunities. For instance, ISS reported that in 2020, 96 Ugandan women, mostly children and youth, were intercepted at Nairobi's international airport in January en route to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for work opportunities. The women were victims of a well-established human trafficking ring in Eastern Africa, headquartered in Kenya and operating under the guise of employment agencies.

In addition, the covert nature of operations of the criminal networks continues to pose a challenge to security agencies involved in gathering admissible evidence for possible successful hearings of traffickers in courts of law. This resonates with research findings by Shink, who emphasised that due to the clandestine nature of the practice, information on the characteristics of victims and their experiences, as well as the characteristics and networks of traffickers, is mostly anecdotal and often hard to generalise. Moreover, according to a study by Gezinski and Gonzalez-Pons (2022), the non-inclusion of prevalence data to inform policy making has affected the legislative debates on how to combat trafficking by legislating digital spaces. In the long run, the weak legislation of digital spaces not only affects the capability of security forces, judicial services and other relevant actors to combat human trafficking but also emboldens traffickers to continue engaging in the vice with impunity.

Besides, the advancement in technology enables traffickers to conduct transactions via the web, including coordinating the activities of victims. This challenge was also re-echoed by Raets and Janssens (2021) whose study established that although the trafficking-technology nexus was a growing area of public and policy concern, as far

as empirical research is concerned, the subject is still a relatively open field. This makes it difficult to verify the purpose of travel and trace the suspected traffickers for prosecution in the Courts of law. A similar concern was raised by Sarkar (2015) who revealed that traffickers and crime networks made good use of sophisticated software in order to safeguard their anonymity. Sarkar further stated that human traffickers make use of online storage and hosting services as well as advanced encryption techniques to counteract digital forensic investigations by the police.

**Given the borderless nature of the criminal networks, there is a lack of formal protocols or agreements amongst member countries in the Eastern Africa region to counter the challenge. Victims are often sneaked out of their countries of origin via ungazetted border points before being given travel documents from other countries for onward travel to the destination.**

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Given the borderless nature of the criminal networks, there is a lack of formal protocols or agreements amongst member countries in the Eastern Africa region to counter the challenge. Victims are often sneaked out of their countries of origin via ungazetted border points before being given travel documents from other countries for onward travel to the destination. Moreover, there is inadequate training of personnel, including those working in immigration departments to ably handle suspected cases of human trafficking at gazette entry and exit points. The concern of inadequate capacity was also re-echoed by Cheruiyot (2014) whose study established that the capacity of the Department of immigration in the control of human trafficking in Kenya was found to be wanting in terms of personnel, relevant training and use of modern equipment for detection of fraud, surveillance and patrol.

## **Conclusion**

Though there are large strides towards efforts aimed at countering human trafficking, the Eastern Africa region continues to grapple with a multitude of challenges as far as human trafficking is concerned. Criminal networks, spanning across the globe, are growingly being run by East African nationals, offering a veil of "credibility" to unsuspecting victims. The networks also continue to exploit socio-economic vulnerabilities of the region, especially unemployment, targeting vulnerable persons, particularly the youths, women and children. Statistics indicate that criminal networks are increasingly using women in their processes, highlighting their key importance in ensuring the success of operations. This implies that the continued failure to sensitise the masses (including youths and women) in policy formulation procedures as well as the persistent existence of socio-economic vulnerabilities will continue to water down the anti-human trafficking measures and or gains.

It is worth noting that the advancement in technology is likely to skyrocket the impunity with which criminal networks operate in the Eastern Africa region as where by digital spaces increase the vulnerability of the ignorant communities to crime scams. The perpetrators have developed capacity to exploit the internet, particularly online social media platforms to identify and fish potential victims hardly leaving any traces. In addition, the increasing usage of the “dark web” will likely lead to a surge in incidents of human trafficking for organ harvesting as well as strengthening the linkage between criminal networks and terror groups in the region.

Therefore, relevant stakeholders need to continue developing capacity to ably monitor virtual spaces, create actionable digital space regulations as well as empower the security actors to execute their mandate as far as countering Human trafficking is concerned. Notably, there is a need for a clear distinction between protection of human rights, internet freedom and appropriate use of the internet if online crimes are to be effectively countered.

## **Recommendations**

### **From the study, the following recommendations have been deduced:**

The complex and transnational nature of human trafficking in the Eastern Africa region calls for an integrated response and the role of organisations like the Africa Court of Justice and Human rights cannot underscored. This is because such bodies can ably address both national and regional cases.

Enhance efforts geared towards building the resilience of netizens to human trafficking. This includes designing measures to identify vulnerable persons prone to being targeted by human trafficking rings. Rehabilitation programs of former victims should not only be offered to former victims but also extended in the general society.

For security actors to effectively perform this task, there is a need to re-emphasise the importance of family as a key unit in any community. This will create safe spaces for would be victims to share their concerns and potentially negative approaches from human traffickers as well as the ability to identify changes in character at an early stage. One of the key challenges observed during the study was the inability of security actors to be at par with the changing trends, especially as far as technological advancement is concerned. Therefore, there is a need to skill actors, including the netizens on how to positively utilise the technological boom and hone their ability to identify possible online human trafficking networks. Further, security actors and other relevant stakeholders need to be trained on good record - keeping practices to ease retrieval and reference whenever the need arises. Moreover, security actors, both those working in the security sector and in organisations engaged in fighting human trafficking, lacked expertise in dealing with the vice.



There is also need for sustained sensitisation efforts of the netizens, especially the youths on the impact of human trafficking and their potential to counter the threat. They need to be constantly reminded of the various ways on how they can actively contribute to sustainable peace and security in their communities, and how to distinguish between a genuine employment opportunity and a scam.

Local leaders need to be given awareness on monitoring of organisations involved in people management to easily identify elements that may be covertly engaging in human trafficking. Local leaders could also be used by governments to continuously sensitise persons about the imminent danger posed by and the various methods of human trafficking during village/community meetings or gatherings.

In addition, efforts need to be put in place to popularize existing help centres for people who have fallen victim to human trafficking. These could either be run by the government and necessary NGOs. This is because former victims revealed ignorance about existing anti-human traffic measures or even possibilities of accessing legal redress.

Besides, efforts geared towards enhancing the cooperation between the Government and civil society organisations engaged in anti-human trafficking need to be boosted. There is also need for investment in more research aimed at understanding the phenomenon of human trafficking to ably design measures aimed at curtailing the rapid growth of the vice in the region. Such research should consider understanding the people's mindsets, putting into perspective the identified underlying push and pull factors that are behind the continued existence of the threat.

Security actors in the Eastern Africa region ought to work as a united force as criminal networks operate across borders. Moreover, for the successful prosecution of human trafficking cases in Courts of law, there is a need for enhanced cooperation between the judiciary and relevant stakeholders in member countries.

Lastly, there is a need to commit adequate funds to anti-human trafficking efforts, deliberately investing in activities that would provide employment opportunities for their youth as well as providing social services, particularly medical care and education, that are often capitalised on by criminal networks to lure targeted persons into their nets.

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# East African Community Regional Force Intervention in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Actors and Implications for Regional Peace and Stability

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyses the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) intervention in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), focusing on its formation, mandate, and impact on regional peace and stability. Deployed in November 2022, the EACRF was established by the East African Community (EAC) to address the conflict in eastern DRC involving various armed groups, particularly the March 23 Movement (M23). The paper uses the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) to contextualize the EACRF's role within the broader East African security landscape, highlighting its achievements and limitations. Furthermore, the paper investigates the coordination challenges faced by the EACRF. Key findings suggest that while the EACRF facilitated several non-violent territorial transfers and fostered regional diplomatic engagement, its effectiveness was compromised by ambiguities in its mandate, operational challenges, and conflicting national interests among member states. The paper concludes by providing policy recommendations and lessons learned from the now-defunct EACRF mission. The findings underscore the importance of ongoing diplomatic engagement and adaptive strategies to achieve sustainable peace in eastern DRC through regionalized interventions.

**Keywords:** *East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), DRC, East African Community, Great Lakes Region, regional integration, peacekeeping*

# Introduction

The deployment of the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in November 2022 marked a significant moment in regional peacekeeping efforts. Composed of troops from Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, the EACRF was given a challenging mandate: to "contain, defeat, and eradicate negative forces" operating in the unstable eastern DRC (Byiers et al., 2023). This region, plagued by decades of instability, rebel insurgencies, and inter-ethnic violence, has witnessed numerous attempts by both regional and international actors to restore order. However, it remains one of Africa's most complex conflict zones. The resurgence of the March 23 Movement (M23), a rebel group operating in North Kivu, since late 2021 has reignited conflict in the area, further complicating the EACRF's mission (Tamm, 2019).

The outbreak of fighting in Kibumba on October 24, 2023, between the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) and M23 highlighted the fragile nature of peace in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This confrontation, which resulted in the death of a Kenyan soldier, showed the operational challenges the EACRF faced when dealing with well-established rebel groups. Additionally, the incident has sparked broader discussions about the effectiveness of regional peacekeeping forces and the difficulties involved in addressing the long-standing issues that have fuelled conflict in eastern DRC for decades (Karbo & Mutisi, 2011). Central to these discussions is the challenge of engaging M23—a group that has persistently violated peace agreements—and determining how the EACRF aligned with the broader international peacekeeping framework in the region (Russo, 2021).

As EACRF approached the end of its initial one-year mandate in December 2023, scrutiny of its effectiveness intensified. Criticism from the Congolese government and local populations revolves around the force's perceived passivity in responding to M23 and other armed groups (Mhandara, 2020). Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi expressed dissatisfaction with what he saw as the EACRF's reluctance to take more aggressive military action against the M23, arguing that its "neutral" stance failed to deliver the security gains expected (Byiers et al., 2023). Local communities, similarly, disillusioned, held protests, calling for the departure of foreign forces, including the EACRF, whose presence they deemed ineffectual. The mandate for the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) was not renewed, leading DRC to agree to deploy the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) SAMIDRC mission.

The mandate's ambiguity was a central issue that complicated EACRF's operations. While the force was initially framed as a peace enforcement mission, its actions were more aligned with political dialogue and non-violent conflict resolution, by facilitating territorial transfers from rebel groups (Adolphe, 2023). Data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) revealed that the EACRF overwhelmingly favoured non-combat strategies and engaged in armed clashes only when necessary. Of sixty-one recorded engagements, fifty-three were strategic developments, and only six involved confrontations. This data suggests that the EACRF prioritized diplomacy over military engagement despite its official mandate to neutralize rebel forces. Consequently, the force faced accusations of ineffectiveness in achieving tangible security outcomes, leading to calls for reevaluating its role in the DRC.

Beyond the immediate security challenges, the EACRF's intervention raised broader questions about the interests and motivations of the countries contributing troops to the mission. Each member state had national security and economic considerations that shaped its engagement in the DRC. For example, Uganda's involvement was closely tied to its interest in securing areas populated by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan rebel coalition, while also protecting its economic assets in the region (Williams, 2024). On the other hand, Burundi focuses on neutralizing Burundian rebel groups operating in the DRC (Wielenga et al., 2023). As the lead nation in the Nairobi Process, Kenya emphasized the importance of political dialogue, reflecting its broader regional diplomatic agenda. These differing priorities pose significant challenges to maintaining a unified and coherent mission, as conflicting national interests can detract from the force's effectiveness.

Another layer of complexity arose with the deployment of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) peacekeeping mission, known as the SADC Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC), which was deployed in December 2023 and has a one-year mandate. The decision not to renew the mandate of EACRF by the DRC government and the quick deployment of the SAMIDRC force was indicative of geopolitical differences, especially between DRC and Rwanda. In the past, challenges in peacekeeping coordination have highlighted the difficulties of multi-force peacekeeping in the region (Russo, 2021).

In addition to the operational and logistical challenges, EACRF's intervention had broader implications for regional integration and stability in East Africa. The force's deployment represented a significant step in the East African Community's (EAC) efforts to institutionalize regional security cooperation (Tchie, 2023). While the force's success in stabilizing the eastern DRC remains in question, its establishment signalled the growing willingness of EAC member states to collaborate on security issues, which could pave the way for deeper political and economic integration in the future (Byiers et al., 2023). However, the divergent national interests of contributing countries highlighted the difficulties of achieving a unified regional security agenda, and the EACRF's mixed results may serve as a cautionary tale for future regional initiatives.

Finally, the EACRF's deployment to the DRC served as a critical case study of regional peacekeeping in Africa, illustrating the potential and limitations of such efforts. By examining the force's mandate, its operations, and the complex web of geopolitical interests that influence its actions, this article seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the EACRF's intervention. The lessons learned from this case could have far-reaching implications for future regional security initiatives in East Africa and across the continent.

### **The Nairobi Process and formation of the East African Regional Force**

The security interdependence in East Africa is driven by several shared threats, including armed rebel groups, cross-border insurgencies, and inter-ethnic violence, which have consistently shaped the region's security landscape (Khadiagala, 2017). For instance, the presence of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the eastern DRC, a Ugandan-origin rebel group, poses a direct threat to Uganda's security, prompting Uganda to maintain an active military presence in the region (Tamm, 2019; Hadji, 2024). Similarly, Rwanda's involvement in the DRC stems from its security concerns over the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a rebel group with historical ties to the Rwandan genocide (Wielenga et al., 2023). Burundi, too, is concerned with the presence of Burundian rebel groups operating within the DRC's borders, such as the National Liberation Forces (FNL) and the Popular Forces of Burundi (FPB) (Wielenga et al., 2023).

The EAC has progressively evolved from a regional cooperation framework primarily focused on economic integration to one that actively engages in collective security and conflict resolution (Byiers et al., 2023). The origins of EAC security cooperation can be traced back to the establishment of the EAC in 1999, which initially emphasized economic integration and regional development. However, growing regional instability, particularly in the Great Lakes region, highlighted the need for a more robust security framework (Bayeh, 2014).

The establishment of the East African Standby Force (EASF) in 2004 marked a significant development in the EAC's security posture. The EASF was designed to provide rapid response capabilities to crises in East Africa, complementing efforts at conflict prevention and resolution (Walsh, 2020). Over time, the EAC recognized the limitations of the EASF and sought to enhance its capacity to address emerging security challenges more effectively. This led to the creation of the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) in 2022, which aims to address specific conflicts in the DRC, reflecting a more targeted and proactive approach to regional security (Busingye, 2022).

The Nairobi Process gained momentum with the 2021 Nairobi Summit on Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region. This summit brought together leaders from East African countries, including the DRC, Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda, to discuss regional stability (Byiers et al., 2023). The summit laid the groundwork for future negotiations that highlighted the need for a coordinated regional strategy to tackle the security crisis



in eastern DRC. These discussions culminated in formally establishing the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) in November 2022. The EACRF was given a mandate to contain, defeat, and eliminate the opposing forces that pose a threat to regional stability (Kweka, 2024),

The establishment of the EACRF was significantly shaped by a series of peace dialogues and negotiations to address the ongoing protracted conflict in eastern DRC. A key component of these efforts was the Nairobi Processes, a diplomatic initiative designed to reduce the persistent violence caused by various armed groups in the region (Mhandara, 2020). These dialogues, involving key regional players and international stakeholders, were instrumental in shaping the mandate and operational framework of the EACRF.

The Nairobi Process achieved several successes, including establishing the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) and formulating a clear mandate to enhance security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This agreement marked a significant step toward regional cooperation, with the deployment of the EACRF representing a collective effort by East African states to address shared security concerns (Adolphe, 2023). The process successfully mobilized regional resources and political will, demonstrating a commitment to a unified approach to conflict resolution in the eastern DRC.

However, the Nairobi Process also faced notable shortcomings. One significant issue was the need for more clarity and consensus regarding the operational mandate of the EACRF. While the regional force was intended to have an offensive mandate to tackle armed groups, differing interpretations of its role led to criticisms of the force's perceived passivity and its focus on political dialogue over military action (Russo, 2021). Failing to reconcile these differences entirely led to dissatisfaction among local stakeholders and Congolese leaders, who argue that the EACRF's actions have not adequately addressed the ongoing violence (Tchie, 2023).

Another shortcoming was the limited engagement with non-state actors and rebel groups that continued to operate despite the diplomatic efforts. The complexity of the conflict, characterized by multiple actors with varying interests, made it challenging to achieve a comprehensive and lasting resolution through the Nairobi Processes alone (Busingye, 2022). The persistence of violence and the emergence of new conflicts highlight the limitations of the diplomatic framework in achieving sustainable peace.

Diplomacy was crucial in shaping EACRF's formation and operational approach. The Nairobi Process exemplified how diplomatic initiatives can foster regional cooperation and facilitate the creation of peacekeeping forces like the EACRF (Mhandara, 2020). By bringing together regional leaders and stakeholders, these dialogues helped to align objectives and secure commitments from member states, providing a foundation for the EACRF's mandate and deployment.



However, diplomacy's effectiveness in resolving complex conflicts such as the one in eastern DRC is often limited by the parties' diverse and sometimes conflicting interests. While diplomatic efforts succeeded in establishing the EACRF and setting its operational parameters, the ongoing violence, and the challenge of coordinating with existing forces like MONUSCO and the FARDC underscore the difficulties in achieving comprehensive conflict resolution through diplomacy alone (Adolphe, 2023; Russo, 2021).

Moreover, diplomacy's role was also constrained by the need for continuous engagement and adaptation to changing dynamics. EACRF's ability to navigate these complexities and address the underlying causes of conflict was crucial in determining the overall success of diplomatic efforts in the region (Tchie, 2023). As such, while the Nairobi Process laid the necessary groundwork for regional security cooperation, its limitations highlighted the need for more diplomatic engagement and adaptability in addressing the evolving conflict landscape in the eastern DRC.

The East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) was established to address the ongoing conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by containing, defeating, and eradicating hostile forces operating in the region (Tchie, 2023). This force comprised troops from Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, all collectively cooperating to stabilize the volatile eastern DRC. The strategic goals of the EACRF included facilitating dialogue between the Congolese government and various rebel groups, ensuring the protection of civilians, and restoring order in areas affected by conflict (Adolphe, 2023).

Despite its ambitious mandate, the EACRF faced several operational challenges. One significant issue was the clarity and consistency of its mandate. While the EACRF was intended to be a neutral force focused on non-violent solutions, it faced criticism for not taking more aggressive military action against groups like the M23. The perceived passivity of the EACRF led to dissatisfaction among local populations and Congolese leaders, who argued that the force's approach had been insufficient to address the persistent violence (Russo, 2021).

Additionally, logistical and operational challenges could have helped the EACRF's effectiveness. The force's diverse composition, with troops from different countries, led to varying priorities and approaches, complicating coordination and unified strategic action. The EACRF's operational effectiveness was also hindered by the complex security environment in eastern DRC, characterized by numerous armed groups and ever-changing alliances that present ongoing challenges (Amable, 2022).

The coordination between the EACRF, MONUSCO, and FARDC was crucial in the regional security strategy. Founded in 1999, MONUSCO has been a critical player in the DRC, with a mandate to protect civilians, support the country's stabilization, and facilitate humanitarian assistance. (Adolphe, 2023).

Both collaboration and tension marked the EACRF's interaction with MONUSCO. On the one hand, the EACRF and MONUSCO shared common goals of stabilizing the eastern DRC and protecting civilians. Coordination between these forces was essential to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure adequate coverage of conflict zones (Russo, 2021). Aligning their strategies and operational approaches proved challenging. MONUSCO's long-term presence and established protocols occasionally conflicted with the EACRF's more recent and dynamic mandate, resulting in coordination and operational coherence issues.

The relationship between the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) faced similar challenges. The FARDC, as the national military force of the DRC, has its objectives and difficulties in managing the security situation in the eastern part of the country. While the EACRF was intended to complement the FARDC's efforts, integrating the regional force into the security framework proved problematic. Coordination issues and varying levels of cooperation between the EACRF and FARDC impacted the overall effectiveness of the regional security strategy (Busingye, 2022).

## **Methodology**

This paper utilized qualitative research methods and content analysis to explore the actors involved and the implications of EACRF's intervention in eastern DRC. It utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data comprised official policy statements from regional economic communities (RECs) like the EAC and SADC. Secondary sources included academic literature from books, journals, and think tank reports.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study used the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver developed. The theory provides a conceptual lens through which to analyze regional security dynamics. It posits that international security is best understood regarding regional groupings of states whose security concerns are interconnected (Buzan & Wæver, 1997). According to Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), security interdependence is generally more vital within a specific region than between different regions. This means threats, conflicts, and security challenges are typically internal and shared among neighbouring states within a regional security complex. This interdependence occurs because states in a region are geographically close, and their security concerns are influenced by regional threats and interactions (Amable, 2022).

A regional security complex is thus characterized by the interactions between various actors—states and non-state actors—within a specific geographical space where security is inherently relational (Buzan & Wæver, 1997). These actors are tied together through a web of security interdependence, in which actions one state takes to enhance its security often influence the security dynamics of its neighbours. In this sense,

regional security complexes are defined by patterns of amity and enmity that shape the interactions between states and how these interactions create zones of relative stability or conflict (Amable, 2022).

The East African and Great Lakes regions exemplify the dynamics described by RSCT. The ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a case in point, as it affects the security of several neighbouring states, including Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, and Burundi. These countries, in turn, play direct or indirect roles in the conflict through military intervention, support for proxy forces, or involvement in diplomatic efforts to resolve conflict (Tamm, 2019). The East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) intervention in the DRC can be analyzed through the RSCT framework as a response to shared regional threats and the interdependent security environment of East Africa.

The RSCT framework helps explain these interventions by identifying the DRC's instability as a core issue for the broader regional security complex. In the Great Lakes region, the security concerns of states are deeply interconnected. Instability in one state, particularly in a weak or conflict-ridden state like the DRC, has direct implications for the security of neighbouring countries (Karbo & Mutisi, 2011). This shared threat perception has driven regional actors to seek collective security solutions, such as the deployment of the EACRF, to contain the spillover effects of the DRC conflict.

Moreover, RSCT emphasizes that shared threats are not limited to state actors. Non-state actors, such as rebel groups and militias, are critical in shaping the regional security landscape (Amable, 2022). The proliferation of armed groups in the DRC, including the M23, FDLR, ADF, and others, underscores the complexity of the regional security complex. These groups not only threaten the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the DRC but also undermine the security of neighbouring states through cross-border attacks, recruitment, and the smuggling of arms and resources (Tamm, 2019). The East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) mandates to "contain, defeat, and eradicate negative forces" operating in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Byiers et al., 2023). This mandate reflected a comprehensive strategy designed to address the region's complex and shared security challenges. The EACRF aimed to restore stability and peace within the DRC and across neighbouring countries by focusing on these forces. This approach recognizes the interconnected nature of security in the region, emphasizing the importance of collaboration among states to effectively combat threats that may otherwise spill over borders, disrupt social order, and undermine regional development.

## Findings

The eastern DRC is a complex theatre of conflict characterized by a proliferation of armed groups and ethnic militias (Khadiagala, 2017). These non-state actors have significantly contributed to the region's instability and violence. Prominent among these armed groups is the March 23 Movement (M23), a rebel faction formed in 2012 from defectors of

the Congolese army. The M23 has been a critical player in the ongoing conflict, engaging in numerous battles with Congolese government forces and rival groups (Wielenga et al., 2023). Their resurgence in late 2021 marked a significant escalation in violence in the eastern DRC, with the group capturing significant territory and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the region.

Other significant armed groups include the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan Islamist rebel group active in the eastern DRC since the late 1990s (Hadji, 2014). The ADF has been involved in numerous attacks against both military and civilian targets, contributing to the high levels of violence and insecurity in North Kivu province (Tamm, 2019). Additionally, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a Rwandan Hutu rebel group, has maintained a presence in the eastern DRC, where it has been involved in clashes with both Congolese and neighbouring Rwandan forces (Karbo & Mutisi, 2011).

Ethnic militias also play a critical role in the conflict dynamics. Groups such as the Mai-Mai militias, often organized along ethnic lines, have been involved in resistance against armed groups and conflicts with other local militias. These militias are typically motivated by ethnic solidarity, local grievances, and resource competition, further complicating the security landscape (Baaz & Stern, 2017). Their activities contribute to the overall instability and impede efforts at reconciliation and peacebuilding within the region.

### **The Congolese Security Forces**

The Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) are a pivotal player in the ongoing conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), functioning as combatants and vital participants in initiatives to restore stability. Nonetheless, the FARDC encounters considerable challenges in effectively managing security due to insufficient training, corruption, and limited resources (Russo, 2021). These challenges have hindered the FARDC's ability to combat armed groups and control the eastern DRC's vast and often remote territories.

Allegations of human rights abuses and collaboration with some armed groups have further complicated the FARDC's performance. For instance, there have been reports of FARDC units engaging in illicit activities, including extortion

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and collusion with rebel factions, undermining their legitimacy and effectiveness in addressing the conflict (Mhandara, 2020). This situation has not only damaged the reputation of the FARDC but also fueled local resentment and contributed to the ongoing cycle of violence.

Despite these challenges, the FARDC remains a critical component of regional security architecture. Efforts to reform and professionalize the FARDC have been ongoing, with international support aimed at improving the effectiveness and accountability of the forces. However, the impact of these reforms has been uneven, and the FARDC continues to struggle with the complex realities of the conflict in the eastern DRC (Baaz & Stern, 2017).

### **Influence of Multinational Forces**

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has been a significant international actor in the DRC since its establishment in 2010. MONUSCO's mandate includes protecting civilians, supporting stabilization, and facilitating humanitarian assistance (Adolphe, 2023). The mission's deployment has provided a security framework for various peacebuilding and development efforts.

However, MONUSCO's effectiveness has been the subject of considerable debate. Critics argue that MONUSCO has struggled to achieve its objectives despite its extensive resources and personnel, particularly in areas where armed groups, such as the M23 and ADF, are most active (Russo, 2021). The mission has faced challenges related to the limited mandate for direct military engagement and difficulties in coordination with local and regional forces. For example, MONUSCO's involvement in the eastern DRC has sometimes been characterized by a reactive rather than proactive approach, leading to criticisms regarding its inability to prevent or mitigate ongoing violence effectively (Adolphe, 2023).

In addition to MONUSCO, other multinational and regional forces have been involved in the DRC's conflict. The East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), deployed in November 2022, represented a regional effort to address the security challenges in the eastern DRC. Comprising troops from Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, the EACRF's mandate included containment and defeat of opposing forces, focusing on engaging in dialogue and political solutions (Byiers et al., 2023).

Additionally, the deployment of the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) SAMIDRC mission, following the DRC's refusal to renew the mandate of the EACRF, introduced an additional dimension to the multinational security framework in the DRC. The absence of coordinated intervention efforts has hindered the achievement of peace in eastern DRC.

## Regional Factors in the East African Community Regional Force

Burundi and Kenya, as members of the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), have distinct roles and interests in the DRC conflict. These countries contributed troops to the EACRF, which was established in response to the persistent violence in the eastern DRC. Their involvement reflected both regional solidarity and individual national interests.

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Burundi's participation in the EACRF was influenced by its security concerns, particularly the threat posed by Burundian rebel groups operating from the DRC. The presence of the National Liberation Forces (NLF) and the Popular Forces of Burundi (PFB) in the eastern DRC has prompted Burundi to seek a more significant role in regional security efforts to counter these groups (Bayeh, 2014). Burundi's engagement in the EACRF can be seen as part of its broader strategy to stabilize its security environment while contributing to regional peacekeeping efforts.

Kenya, as the leading contributor to the EACRF, had a significant stake in the success of the regional force. Kenya's leadership role is motivated by its interest in regional stability and its strategic position as a key player within the East African Community. The Kenyan government emphasized the importance of political dialogue and non-violent solutions to the conflict, reflecting its broader diplomatic strategy and desire to enhance its regional leadership role (Busingye, 2022). Kenya's position aligned with its broader foreign policy goals of fostering regional integration and stability.

## External Powers

External powers, particularly China and Western countries, have also influenced the dynamics of the DRC conflict, primarily through their economic and geopolitical interests. China's involvement in the DRC is primarily driven by its interest in its vast mineral resources. The DRC is rich in cobalt, copper, and coltan, crucial for various high-tech industries (Byiers et al., 2023). China has established numerous mining ventures and investments in the DRC, making it a significant external player in the conflict. Chinese companies and the Chinese government have been involved in various aspects of the mineral extraction industry, which has implications for local conflicts and economic conditions (Amable, 2022). China's influence in the mineral sector has often been linked to broader geopolitical strategies to secure resources and establish economic footholds in Africa.

A mix of humanitarian, diplomatic, and military interventions has characterized Western responses to the DRC conflict. Western countries, including the United States and European Union members, have provided financial aid, humanitarian assistance, and support for peacekeeping missions such as MONUSCO (Adolphe, 2023). Additionally, Western nations have been involved in diplomatic efforts to address the conflict, often advocating for reforms and supporting regional peace initiatives. However, criticisms have been leveled at Western approaches for being reactive rather than proactive and failing to adequately address the underlying causes of the conflict (Russo, 2021). The interplay between Western responses and local dynamics reflected the broader challenges of international intervention in complex conflicts.

## **Discussion**

### **Impact on Regional Security and Stability**

Initial assessments of the EACRF's impact on armed groups showed a complex interplay. On the one hand, the EACRF's deployment led to significant territorial transfers from rebel control to regional force management, reflecting success in its efforts to displace hostile entities (Adolphe, 2023). Data from the ACLED showed that the EACRF effectively facilitated the handover of territories, which was crucial in reducing the operational space for groups like the M23 (Russo, 2021).

However, the force faced substantial challenges in fully addressing the underlying resource conflicts that fuel much of the violence in the eastern DRC. Various armed groups' control of lucrative mineral resources continues to drive the conflict significantly (Mhandara, 2020). The EACRF's mandate, while focusing on security, did not directly address these resource-based issues, which were significant impediments to long-term stability (Byiers et al., 2023). Thus, while the EACRF made strides in territorial control, the broader resource conflicts that sustain the violence persist beyond the immediate capabilities of the force.

The EACRF also played a critical role in fostering security cooperation and diplomatic relations among EAC member states. The Nairobi Process that led to the deployment of the EACRF represented the first collaborative effort by Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania to collectively address regional security challenges. This joint action reflected increased security integration within the EAC framework, demonstrating the community's commitment to tackling shared security threats.

The force's presence facilitated enhanced diplomatic engagement between member states, particularly in coordinating security strategies and sharing intelligence. For instance, coordination between EACRF member states was essential in aligning their military strategies and operational goals and improving regional security efforts' overall coherence.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this cooperation could have been more supported by



competing national interests and divergent strategic priorities among member states. The varied interests of countries like Uganda, which is involved in combating its rebel groups and securing resource-rich areas, and Kenya, which prioritized political dialogue over military engagement, posed challenges to unified regional action (Tchie, 2023; Hadji, 2024)). These discrepancies created friction and impacted the overall efficacy of the EACRF's operations, demonstrating the complexity of achieving seamless security cooperation in a multifaceted regional context.

### **Challenges to Effective Peace**

Despite its significant mandate and regional support, the EACRF faced numerous challenges that affected its effectiveness in achieving lasting peace in the eastern DRC. One major challenge was the ambiguity and perceived inconsistency of the EACRF's mandate. The force's initial directive to "contain, defeat, and eradicate negative forces" was complicated by its operational reality, emphasizing a neutral stance and political dialogue over direct military engagement (Adolphe, 2023). This approach led to criticism from local actors and Congolese leaders who feel that the EACRF's actions did not sufficiently address the persistent threats posed by armed groups such as the M23 (Russo, 2021).

Another significant challenge was coordinating with existing international forces, including the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC). Both cooperation and conflict marked the interaction between these entities, complicating efforts to create a unified strategy for regional stability (Busingye, 2022). The overlapping mandates and objectives among MONUSCO, the FARDC, and the EACRF led to issues of operational coherence and effective resource allocation (Tchie, 2023).

EACRF's ability to foster peace was hampered by broader structural issues, particularly the ongoing resource conflicts that drive much of the violence in eastern DRC. Without addressing these underlying economic and political factors, the EACRF's security efforts alone were inadequate for establishing sustainable peace (Byiers et al., 2023). While the EACRF progressed in some areas, its effectiveness was limited by regional instability and complex geopolitical dynamics (Magabo & Mushitsi, 2024).

### **Mechanism for Regional Integration**

The EACRF represented a significant mechanism for regional integration within the East African Community (EAC). Formed in response to the escalating conflict in the eastern DRC, it embodied the EAC's commitment to collective security and regional stability (Byiers et al., 2023). Its creation aligned with the EAC's broader objectives to foster economic integration, political cooperation, and security collaboration among its member states.



The deployment of EACRF signposted EAC's strategic vision to integrate security measures into its broader regional framework. By pooling resources and coordinating military efforts, the EACRF aimed to address cross-border security challenges and enhance regional stability (Busingye, 2022). This approach underscored the EAC's role in facilitating a collective security arrangement where member states collaborate to manage and mitigate regional threats.

### **National Interests and Collective Security**

The integration of national interests within the EACRF framework posed significant challenges. Each member state brought distinct national priorities and security concerns to the regional force, which can complicate the pursuit of collective security (Magabo & Mushitsi, 2024). For example, Uganda's involvement in areas with substantial oil deposits and ongoing insurgencies, such as those involving the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), reflects its national interests (Hadji, 2024). Similarly, Burundi's engagement was influenced by its internal security issues, including its conflict with local rebel groups.

Balancing diverse national interests while aiming for a cohesive regional security strategy was challenging for the EACRF. The force had to navigate competing priorities and ensure its operations supported collective security objectives and individual member states' interests.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Lessons Learned**

EACRF's operational experience offered valuable lessons for future regional cooperation in East Africa and beyond. One key lesson was the importance of clarity in the mandate and objectives of regional security initiatives. The EACRF's mixed successes and criticisms highlighted the need for a well-defined operational framework that aligns with regional and national expectations (Adolphe, 2023). It was essential for effective implementation and achieving desired outcomes that all stakeholders have a shared understanding of the force's role and goals.

Another lesson was addressing competing national interests within a regional security framework. EACRF's experience underscored the importance of creating dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms among member states to harmonize their security objectives and reduce tensions. Future regional initiatives can benefit from incorporating these lessons to enhance their effectiveness and sustainability.

Lastly, EACRF's operations illustrated the value of integrating security efforts with broader regional integration goals. By aligning security measures with economic and political cooperation, EACRF contributed to a more comprehensive approach to regional integration. This alignment fosters long-term stability and cooperation among member states (Byiers et al., 2023).

## **Regional Peacebuilding**

The ongoing conflict in the eastern DRC has deep-rooted causes that necessitate long-term solutions beyond immediate military interventions. Addressing the conflict requires a multifaceted approach that tackles the symptoms and the underlying issues contributing to regional instability (Russo, 2021). Key to this is addressing the complex interplay of ethnic tensions, resource competition, and political instability that has perpetuated violence in eastern DRC.

A critical aspect of a long-term solution involves strengthening the DRC's governance and institutional frameworks. Effective governance can mitigate the influence of armed groups by providing alternative avenues for political participation and addressing grievances that fuel conflict (Baaz & Stern, 2017). Moreover, economic development initiatives to improve livelihoods and reduce dependence on illegal resource exploitation are essential for sustainable peace (Busingye, 2022). Integrating local communities into peacebuilding processes and ensuring their participation in decision-making can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of conflict resolution efforts.

## **East African Community and International Partners**

Several policy recommendations can enhance the effectiveness of the EACRF and broader regional peacebuilding efforts for the EAC and its international partners.

First, the EACRF needs a more transparent and coherent mandate that aligns with the expectations of both the regional stakeholders and local populations (Adolphe, 2023). Ensuring that the EACRF's mandate explicitly addresses the need for security operations and political engagement can help reconcile differing views on its role and improve its operational effectiveness.

Second, strengthening coordination between the EACRF and other international actors, such as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Southern Africa Development Community's (SADC) Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC), is crucial for avoiding overlap and ensuring a unified approach to conflict resolution (Russo, 2021). Developing robust mechanisms for information sharing and joint strategic planning can enhance the synergy between these entities and improve overall impact.

Third, the EAC and its partners should focus on long-term capacity building for local institutions and security forces. Training, resources, and support for the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) and local governance structures can help build sustainable peace and reduce reliance on external interventions. Additionally, supporting regional economic integration and development projects can address some of the root causes of conflict by promoting stability and cooperation among neighbouring states.

Building sustainable peace in Eastern Africa requires a holistic approach integrating security, development, and political dimensions. Peacebuilding efforts must address both the immediate needs of conflict-affected populations and the structural factors that contribute to recurring violence. This involves fostering regional cooperation, supporting reconciliation processes, and promoting inclusive governance.

Regional cooperation is vital for addressing cross-border issues and ensuring effective peacebuilding initiatives across the Great Lakes Region. Strengthening regional institutions and enhancing collaboration among East African states can create a more stable and supportive environment for peace. Additionally, fostering reconciliation between different ethnic and political groups within the DRC and neighbouring countries can help reduce tensions and build trust among communities.

Furthermore, sustainable peacebuilding efforts should prioritize the involvement of local actors and communities in the peace process. Ensuring that peace agreements and interventions are inclusive and address the needs and concerns of local populations can enhance the legitimacy and durability of peace initiatives (Busingye, 2022). Long-term investment in education, economic development, and social infrastructure can also play a crucial role in consolidating peace and preventing the resurgence of conflict.

## **Conclusion**

The intervention of the EACRF in Eastern DRC represented a pivotal moment in regional security dynamics and integration efforts. This paper has explored the formation, mandate, and impact of the EACRF, revealing both achievements and challenges associated with its deployment. EACRF's establishment was driven by the Nairobi Processes, which aimed to forge a unified regional response to the persistent violence in eastern DRC. While the EACRF made strides in stabilizing certain areas and facilitating non-violent transfers of territory, its effectiveness was constrained by ambiguous mandates, coordination challenges, and competing national interests (Adolphe, 2023; Russo, 2021).

Theoretical insights from Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) underscore the complexity of the EACRF's role within a broader regional security framework. The RSCT helps to contextualize EACRF's intervention within a network of interrelated security concerns and shared threats in East Africa. However, the theory also highlights limitations in addressing the multifaceted nature of regional conflicts, especially when national interests and diverse actor motivations come into play (Buzan & Wæver, 1997; Walsh, 2020).

EACRF's impact on regional stability was mixed. On one hand, the force successfully reduced certain types of violence and facilitated diplomatic engagement among member states. On the other hand, instability and dissatisfaction among local stakeholders underscored significant gaps in the force's operational effectiveness (Byiers et al., 2023).

Coordination with existing forces like MONUSCO and the upcoming SAMIDRC remains a critical challenge that needs to be addressed to enhance the overall effectiveness of peacekeeping efforts in the region.

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# PROSPECT FOR LONG-TERM STABILITY IN AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW OF THE MIGRATION-SECURITY NEXUS

Yvan Yenda Ilunga

## Abstract

This article examines the dynamics of long-term stability efforts in Africa through the lens of migration-security nexus. Based on the hypothesis that long-term stability of African nations that experience violent conflicts depends on the effective integration of the migration-security nexus in their peace efforts. Additionally, issues such as institution building, security sector reforms and implementation of effective social policies. This article used data triangulation approach, integrating case studies, theoretical analysis and comprehensive literature review. Secondary data gathering and analysis triangulated at the three levels of analysis in international relations: international system, state and individual level of analysis were equally utilized. The Complexity Theory was used to analyze the multifaceted and interconnected nature of the observed migration crises and insecurity. The theory was supported by the Social Cohesion Theory that highlighted the importance of maintaining trust, solidarity and fostering inclusion in peace and security efforts. The paper argues that while continental multinational and dimensional efforts of addressing insecurity and promoting lasting peace remain at the centre of all peace operations conversations, the deployment of multiple strategies: military, economic, financial and social in conflict environments have yet to effectively restore peace. While these are part of the critical domains for peace and security, the complexity of the security landscape within the continent requires that the dynamics of transnational mobility is one of the determinants for peace and stability. This can be addressed through integrated, human-centred policies and multi-stakeholders' coordination that enhance social cohesion and institutional resilience at all levels. The paper recommends the application of humanitarian legitimacy, the consideration of socio-economic and political factors and migrants' societal integration, the establishment of regional comprehensive migration and security frameworks, and the application of flexible and adaptable policies. Hence, transforming migration from a source of insecurity into a catalyst for change.

**Keywords:** *Migration, security, stability, lasting peace, social cohesion*

# Introduction

The current trend in humanitarian intervention and aid and security provision remains state-centred (Sandholtz, 2018). While we observe a proliferation of international non-state actors in places such as Sudan, South Sudan, DRC, and

Somalia, the definition of terms of interventions and the basic concept of humanitarian work remains anchored in the traditional principle of International Law or Law of Armed Conflict (Green, 2018). Over the years, this cadre and regulatory framework have helped with the organization, process, and delivery of humanitarian assistance by protecting both civilians and combatants. However, the current nature of global threats, fragilities and security challenges, specifically in Africa, call for a more comprehensive strategy and complimentary framework.

This framework calls for non-traditional non-state actors to legally and operationally integrate their strategies in the ultimate architecture of humanitarianism (Ilunga, 2020). This would mean questioning, revisiting, and in some instances updating the current existing legal frameworks and practice of humanitarianism and provision of security. For instance, conceptually, the notion of humanitarian legitimacy grew to be only recognized as the sole responsibility of the state and state-vetted and approved actors. This view can no longer hold ground as rebel groups, armed groups, and militias now control a significant portion of countries' territories. In addition to controlling of territories, some are de facto authorities as they have parallel administrations, collect taxes, and provide services.

The profiling of non-state actors and armed groups become complex since the reference to negative actors seem to be a less accurate representation of who they are. Redefinition of these groups' identity and role is essential for future peace support. This view does not come without an ethical question; how do we engage with these actors without upsetting the global norm and the principles of international laws? In the book *Humanitarianism and Security*, Ilunga (2020) developed the idea of humanitarian legitimacy that takes into account the behaviour of these actors, their territorial control and their legality. The dilemma within the policymaking space is that decisions about humanitarian and security continue to be aligned with the legalist approach. This approach tends to protect institutions but does little to provide a path to innovation or the protection of

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civilians. The field of humanitarian and security should not be limited to procedural and legal considerations but adapt, engage, and innovate (Sandvik, 2017).

Another trend is that humanitarian activities are underfunded (Gingerich & Cohen, 2015) and suffer multiple armed attacks toward humanitarian workers (Hoelscher et al., 2017). The deficit in funding is two-fold. One is that the number of crises has significantly increased while the funding has not, forcing donors to think of where to prioritize their investments (Burkle et al., 2014).

Second, the donors' fatigue in places where major funding has not helped change the living conditions due to either unfitness of the interventions or corruption (Concern WorldWide US, 2024). Additionally, the framework of humanitarian intervention and aid is often short-term against the long-term existence of refugee camps. This challenge makes the intervention temporary in a permanent situation, hence increasing frustration, disappointment and sometimes fueling violence. Policymakers, government entities and interveners must consider a holistic approach to the assessment of the current humanitarian and security landscape. Still within the current landscape of humanitarianism, the issue of migration as a permanent component of both urban and rural insecurity is seriously under study.

Migration as a humanitarian and security concern must be addressed by looking at the societal and individual implications of forced displacement in the context of armed conflict. While most of the studies of migration look at the dynamics of migrants in their host countries and their views of countries of origin (Gsir, 2017), challenges associated with displacement are as much in the crisis at the origin of the displacement as it is in the experiences associated with displacement itself. This paper focuses on the dynamics of migration and security within the context of humanitarian crisis. It emphasizes the experiences of the displaced population and their potential consequences. The paper aims at closing a gap in literature and policy on how to address instability using the migration-security nexus.

## **Methodology**

The article employs a triangulation approach integrating case studies, theoretical analysis and comprehensive literature review. This approach is essential since it captures the complex and multi-dimensional aspects of security and migration crisis. The use of case studies helps to focus on specific examples such as countries experiencing violence or conflicts that reveal how migration dynamics uniquely impact stability in the region and at the local level. Hence, providing depth and context that generalized data often overlook (Bennett and Colin, 2007).

The use of case studies offers a basis to understand how variables, such social and institutional stability, political leadership and governance influence the migration-security nexus (Bloemraad, 2013). Theoretical analysis, through the use of complexity

theory, helps to unravel the non-linear and interconnected nature of migration crises, demonstrating that simple, linear solutions are often insufficient and present an incomplete picture of the real story. Complexity theory emphasizes, therefore, the need for adaptive, multi-layered responses, recognizing that changes in one aspect of the migration landscape can have significant effects on others (De Coning, 2018).

This methodology allows for an exploration of both the macro-level factors, such as international policies and state responses, and the micro-level human experiences that shape migration outcomes. The approach is particularly effective for understanding the nuanced interplay between migration and security, highlighting both opportunities and challenges. Ultimately, this mixed-methods approach advocates for more context-sensitive, adaptive, and human-centred policies, emphasizing that effective migration management requires comprehensive engagement at all levels, from local communities to international actors.

### **Theoretical framework**

The paper uses on two key theories: Complexity Theory and Social Cohesion Theory. By combining Complexity Theory (De Coning, 2020) with Social Cohesion Theory (Orazani et al., 2023), this paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the migration-security nexus. On one hand, complexity theory helps analyse the multifaceted and interconnected nature of the observed migration crises and insecurity by taking into account the state of both individuals and institutions. The overarching view of the Complexity Theory is that it emphasizes the importance of coordinated, multi-level responses to migration that consider both the short-term and long-term implications.

On the other hand, Social Cohesion Theory highlights the importance of maintaining trust and solidarity within societies, especially when integrating migrants. Under this theory, policymakers encourage policies that foster inclusion and empathy, helping to build stronger, and more secure societies. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for analysing migration as both a security challenge and an opportunity for social and political stability. They encourage policymakers to adopt flexible, adaptable (De Coning, 2020) and human-centred approaches that address the root causes of migration while promoting social cohesion and institutional resilience.

**Complexity Theory provides a useful lens for understanding the migration-security nexus. It posits that crises such as migration involve multiple interconnected factors, making them difficult to address through simple, linear solutions. The theory encourages policymakers to view migration as a multifaceted issue that requires integrated responses.**

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Complexity Theory provides a useful lens for understanding the migration–security nexus. It posits that crises such as migration involve multiple interconnected factors, making them difficult to address through simple, linear solutions. The theory encourages policymakers to view migration as a multifaceted issue that requires integrated responses. It shows the importance of strengthening institutions (e.g., health systems, legal frameworks) to better manage migration. Moreover, it highlights the need for flexible, adaptable policies that can respond to emergent challenges in migration and security.

Migration cannot be seen in isolation from other socio–political dynamics (Urbański, 2022; Fischer et al., 2021, pp. 91–132); it must be examined within the context of the overarching wellbeing of individuals, communities, and institutions. For instance, when mandating peace keeping missions to curb violence and protect civilians in fragile communities, most of the efforts often focus on peace agreements between belligerent, and sometime underrating the importance of the "health" of displaced populations and national institutions. Failure to do so produce short term and fragile peace (Mvukiyehe & Samii, 2021). The health of individuals is not only physical but also psychological, shaped by their experiences of displacement and violence. Meanwhile, the health of institutions reflects their capacity to manage migration effectively. Weak institutions often fail to coordinate responses, resulting in fragmented, uncoordinated solutions that perpetuate insecurity. Under the migration–security nexus, the following factors are essential to understand.

The element of interconnectedness. Every aspect of the migration crisis—whether economic, social, political, or environmental—is connected. For instance, displacement caused by conflict may have economic roots (poverty, inequality) but will also generate political consequences (weakened governance, depletion of resources, unrest). African nations, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, that continue to experience internal and external migration should use a more integrated approach to understanding and solving their respective crisis (Pinduka & Nhema, 2020).

The aspect of emergent behaviour. The Complexity Theory helps to identify and understand the trends and outcomes of migration, such as xenophobia or community conflict, that may emerge in ways that were not intended or predictable. For instance, migratory flows in Africa have led to many unanticipated challenges for receiving countries and communities, mainly when institutions could not handle large influxes of people.

The non-linearity. Small changes in one part of the system (e.g., a slight shift in migration policy) can have disproportionate effects elsewhere, potentially escalating a crisis or creating opportunities for resolution. The relationships between migrants and host communities or between displaced populations and their countries of origin are often non-linear.

Multiple scales of influence perspective. The theory looks at different levels of analysis (e.g., individual, community, institutional, national, and international) and how they interact. It presents an avenue that the migration–security nexus cannot be fully understood using only one level of analysis.

The Social Cohesion Theory is significant in the context of migration–security nexus. It emphasizes on the urgency of integrating displaced populations into host communities and also look at the nature and level of interactions between people and institutions involved in addressing or perpetuating the crisis. Using an African rooted philosophical thinking of “Ubuntu”, which put the centrality of human agencies while defining societal relationships, social cohesion presents a framework suggesting that migration policies should prioritize human welfare over strict legal frameworks. Policies and programs advance to address migration and security issues should have a human face on them, which acknowledge human experiences and struggles (Brankamp & Weima, 2021).

Social cohesion in this context does not only project the idea of acceptance and living together, but a set of peacebuilding paths that are built on social trust, inclusion, and solidarity among people. In the context of African security and migration conversation, social cohesion theory is a key determinant revealing the trend in the continent's collective effort to create a more peaceful and inclusive space for every victim of fragility.

Furthermore, Social Cohesion Theory is applied to understand the importance of integrating displaced populations into host communities (Saggar, 2021), promoting social stability, and reducing conflict. This theory provides a normative framework for fostering trust, inclusion, and solidarity (Hooghe, 2011), which are essential for the successful management of migration. The comprehensive literature review further grounds the study in the broader field of migration and security studies, offering a robust foundation to validate the findings and highlight gaps that this study aims to address. By synthesizing insights from existing research, the study situates itself within the ongoing scholarly discourse, while also contributing original perspectives.

In migration and security contexts, trust is particularly important between host communities and incoming migrants. Trust must also be cultivated during the ongoing transition from home communities to a place of safety. Between victims and service providers (interveners). Social cohesion theory provides a more pragmatic approach to addressing the trust deficit that could hinder peacebuilding efforts.

Successful migration policies focus on integrating migrants into society—economically, socially, and politically. This includes providing access to education, healthcare, and legal protection, as well as ensuring that migrants have the opportunity to contribute to their new communities. To this view of successful policy, it is also crucial to develop program and mechanism of inclusion and integration of displaced communities in the decision-making processes on issues pertaining to their wellbeing and future (Khalfaoui

et al., 2020). Human agencies and the restoration and promotion of the displaced population's dignity could be well served with genuine appreciation of their contribution to key societal decisions.

A key aspect of social cohesion is the development of a shared sense of identity among victims of conflicts and insecurity. This emergence of a common identity could be positive if mechanisms of social integrations are put in place. But it could also be detrimental to the peace process if displaced people feel alienated by both helpers and institutional destined to protect and support them. This could include home countries or host communities.

Another aspect of social cohesion theory and practice is that when migrants are socially excluded—through discrimination, legal restrictions, or lack of access to services—this can lead to social fragmentation and conflict. Exclusionary policies can exacerbate feelings of resentment or lead to violence, which in turn undermines national and regional security. For African nations, especially the ones in conflict, a multilevel approach to migration and security is essential.

### **Multidimensional Approach**

To better grasp the dynamics and implications of the migration-security nexus, it is crucial to approach the analysis at all levels. The three most referenced levels of analysis in international relations are the international system level of analysis, the state level of analysis, and the individual level of analysis (Sørensen et al., 2022). These three levels inform both the perception and interpretation of global actions by national and international actors. They also present an inclusive multidimensional and stakeholders prism of analysis for major international issues. In this section, I use them to understand the current migration-security nexus in Africa and see how they interconnect.

First, the international system level of analysis focuses on the overarching structures and relationships that govern the global order. Under this level of analysis, issues such as international treaties, alliances, and global institutions like the United Nations are examined. The ongoing displacement crisis around several African regions, the actions of international actors, or their lack thereof, exemplify how global and regional crises affect international politics. From the Syrian crisis in the Middle East to the Sudan crisis in Africa, forced migration as a result of political instabilities continue to be devastating. In addition to the human aspect of these crisis, they also have a widespread global implication such as disrupting the flow of goods and people across borders and ultimately undermining some basic arrangement of the international system such as border integrity (Savio et al., 2022). These crises reveal still how the notion of sovereignty had never vanished in spite of the changes that globalization brings. For instance, the fact that individual countries could unilaterally or collectively decide about which part of the international law and global arrangement to consider in the name of their national

interests, humanitarian rational, or national security reveals the significance and the challenges of the international system.

The basic assumption of international norms under the international level of analysis would stipulate that countries accommodate civilians running from the crisis. Unfortunately, the current nature of responses of regional countries in Africa and other parts of the world shows a more restrictive approach to migration and protection of civilians in conflicts. However, few countries, such as Uganda, continue to have more progressive policies toward refugees and displaced populations in the region (Betts, 2021), as opposed to countries such as South Africa for instance (White & Rispel, 2021). This difference in policies toward refugees and displaced populations reinforces how the complexity of the dynamic of the migration-security nexus under the hospices of the international system level of analysis continues to be subject to individual countries' politics. In places where the United Nations or the African Union have peacekeeping or peace support operations mandates, it would be vital to analyze how host countries and intervening actors perceive and embrace these policies for the betterment of the victims. The nature of the interaction between actors in the regions is key to the successful response to humanitarian crisis or not.

Second, the State or National Level. At the state or national level of analysis, the focus shifts to how internal politics, national priorities, and domestic issues affect a country's foreign policy. The behaviour of states on the international stage is deeply influenced by internal factors such as political ideologies, leadership styles, and economic conditions. The same is true to how countries decide to respond to migration security dynamics. Outside of the African continent, in the U.S; the political divide between liberals and conservatives influences how migration related policy is formulated (Natter et al., 2020). In addition to the ideological ground, despite the growing humanitarian crisis around Africa, most countries continue to prioritize national interest in their internal decision-making processes. This domestic politics' behaviour makes it difficult to support and integrate displaced populations in new communities or countries of their new residence.

Third, the individual level of analysis examines how the beliefs, psychology, and behaviors of individual leaders impact international politics (Faist, 2021). For instance, the personal disposition of political leaders—whether they are diplomatic, confrontational, or strategic, significantly shape how their countries engage with the rest of the world. Leaders' personal beliefs and experiences with displacement could deeply influence their decisions toward migration policy. Leaders who have faced major political, security and displacement struggles, similar to the ones experienced by the current displaced populations, such as Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, often adopt more empathetic and inclusive policies. They tend to be more welcoming and compassionate in their political decisions toward migrants. In contrast, leaders who lack this personal connection to displacement may prioritize core national security narratives and arguments over

humanitarian concerns. This approach of national security could be helpful in the short term but cannot guarantee that national security would be maintained for sure.

The case of South Africa's xenophobic attacks on African migrants, despite the country's own history of displacement during apartheid, illustrate the complexity of leadership in shaping migration responses (Miller & Peters, 2020). Personal experiences with displacement do not always translate into inclusion policies, as evidenced by South Africa's oscillating approach to migration. However, while the debate of leaders' individual experiences could be a subject of intense conversation as one of the levels of analysis, it is essential that as for many other political situations, policies decisions and outcomes are complex and unpredictable. Still, it is essential to establish the framework of analysis that helps understand the levels of intervention in the context of migration-security nexus. Beyond individual leaders, this level also leads to the issue of collective identities as formed and embraced by those in crisis. For example, communities within a state of crisis would identify themselves and likely support each other as a way of cementing their collective identity (Perolini, 2023). This is true for both the oppressed and the oppressors. For leaders, this cultural or collective understanding of crisis can serve as a motivator for foreign policy actions, while for the displaced, their cultural and collective identities could inform their responses to insecurity.

### **Domains of applicability of complexity and social cohesion approaches**

Beyond theoretical and conceptual arguments, it is crucial to explore how this theoretical positionality of the migration-security nexus could be tested and applied. The following dimensions would be essential in advancing the migration-security nexus approach under the theoretical framework of complexity theory: the health of individuals, institutional health, and unintended consequences.

First, is the health of individuals. In migration crises, it is essential to consider displaced individuals' physical and psychological health. People who experience severe trauma or displacement may be more prone to insecurity, violence, or mental health issues, which in turn affect the security dynamics in the host or home countries (Mesa-Vieira et al., 2022). For instance, children who have experienced traumatic experiences may develop a persistent lack of trust and rejection of norms and be more exposed to embracing other coping mechanisms, including violence. Human vulnerability engenders vulnerabilities to individuals and societies.

Second, is institutional health. The capacity of institutions - whether local, national, or international - to respond to migration crises always matters. In countries with weak institutions, migration can lead to destabilization (Müller-Funk et al., 2024). The health of institutions can determine whether a migration influx leads to positive integration or security threats. Hence, strengthening institutions becomes important not only for governance purposes but as preventive measures as well.



Third, is unintended consequences. Policies designed to address migration can have unintended consequences. For example, closing borders may exacerbate humanitarian crises and lead to increased illegal migration, human trafficking, or conflict (Solano & Massey, 2022). Hence, a well-balanced approach to migration crisis is of paramount benefit.

For instance, using the case of the DRC, the displacement caused by ongoing conflict shows the complexity of the crisis and approaches needed to advance sustainable solutions. This internal and external displacement is not merely a function of violence but involves complex socio-political dynamics, including poverty, ethnic tensions, and resource exploitation (Paddon & Lacaille, 2011). The same is the case of conflict and humanitarian crisis in Sudan. A complexity theory approach helps therefore to recognize that simply addressing violence (e.g., through peacekeeping or peace enforcement) without considering the broader socio-economic and political context will not lead to long-term stability.

Under the premises of the social cohesion theory and its usefulness, the framework intends to serve the migration-security nexus by promoting inclusiveness. This would involve creating policies that ensure migrants are treated with dignity and have access to opportunities. When migrants are integrated into the social fabric (Tatarko & Jurcik, 2021), they are less likely to be perceived as a threat and more likely to contribute to national security and stability.

Reducing xenophobia and fragmentation. In contexts where migrants are not integrated, host communities may experience fear or resentment, leading to xenophobic violence or social unrest. Countries like South Africa, where xenophobic attacks against other African migrants have occurred (Tarisayi & Manik, 2020), illustrate the consequences of weak social cohesion. Developing human-centred approaches. Drawing on the Ubuntu concept, social cohesion theory suggests that migration should be viewed through a human-centred lens. This would emphasize on our shared humanity and be strengthened through policies that reflect empathy and solidarity with displaced populations.

Overall, social cohesion theory provides a framework for understanding how to build resilient societies that can absorb migrants without experiencing fragmentation or conflict. It underscores the importance of inclusive policies and shared identities, helping to mitigate security risks associated with migration. It also emphasizes the moral dimension of migration policies, encouraging a shift from a purely legalistic approach to one that prioritizes human welfare.

### **Mobilization and complementarity: Challenges and Path toward sustainable solutions**

Despite many African nations' openness to migrants, several challenges persist.

Chief among them is the fragmentation of international and national responses to migration crises and security challenges. Coordination among actors is often weak, with governments, international organizations, and civil society working in silos. This lack of cooperation leads to inefficient responses that fail to address the root causes of migration and insecurity. Additionally, regional organizations such as the Eastern African Community continues to struggle to find a more inclusive framework and guideline to address with both migration and security crisis (Gasto, 2022). Considerable efforts have been made on the economic front. More still needs to be done on the security and migration fronts. These challenges are partially persistent due to the health of national institutions, which happen to be weak and struggling to manage the influx of migrants and their own economic and security priorities. Even when some countries experience genuine political will to address migration–security related issues, poorly designed policies that either exacerbate insecurity or fail to provide adequate support for displaced populations do not help much. Adequate planning and resource allocation is essential.

To address these challenges, there is a need for more coordinated and complementary approaches to managing migration crises. Both internal and external actors must work together to mobilize resources and expertise. Internal actors, including indigenous communities and religious leaders, possess valuable knowledge and resources that are often overlooked in favour of top-down, externally driven solutions. Moreover, diaspora networks and migrant communities can also play a crucial role in rebuilding their countries of origin. African governments and international organizations should tap into these networks to develop more sustainable migration and security policies. By embracing a more holistic approach—one that considers the health of both individuals and institutions—migration can be transformed from a source of insecurity into a catalyst for stability and development.

## **Conclusion**

Migration and security are deeply interconnected, particularly in Africa, where displacement crises are frequent. This article has highlighted the importance of complexity theory and social cohesion theory in understanding the migration–security nexus. Going forward, migration policies must be human-centred, focusing on social cohesion and the integration of displaced populations. Coordination among local, national, and international actors is crucial for effective crisis management. Further research is needed to explore how migration networks and diaspora communities can contribute to post-conflict reconstruction and long-term security.

## **Recommendations**

This article recommends that there is a need to reconsider the application of humanitarian legitimacy which must include non-state actors such as armed groups and militias that exercise de facto authority. This must be done under strict ethical consideration that ensures that engaging with these actors does not undermine international norms and laws. Policymakers must integrate multiple socio-economic and political factors

when addressing migration crises. Both institutional and institutional health must be strengthened in order to provide sustainable and effective solutions to displaced populations.

Policies must prioritize the integration of migrants into host communities through economic, social, and political inclusion. The use of a social cohesion approach, rooted in concepts like "Ubuntu," should help develop inclusive societies that view migration as an opportunity rather than a threat. Migration-security dynamics should be analysed and addressed at all levels—international, state, and individual. Coordination among these levels will lead to comprehensive responses that integrate short-term and long-term implications of migration.

Encourage regional organizations and African governments to work together to establish comprehensive migration and security frameworks. Strengthening weak institutions is key to managing migration flows effectively and preventing potential destabilization. Policies should be flexible and adaptive to account for the non-linear nature of migration crises. Policymakers need to avoid rigid, purely legalistic approaches and instead embrace human-centred solutions that address the root causes of displacement while enhancing social and institutional resilience.

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# REGIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN 21ST CENTURY AFRICA: A HOLISTIC REVIEW AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

**Mumo Nzau  
Nyaburi Nyadera**

## **Abstract**

This paper seeks to critically examine the state of conflict management approaches in contemporary Africa. The authors illustrate the limitations and effectiveness of these strategies in addressing the evolving and complex security dynamics facing the continent. The study, grounded on the liberal peace theory, investigates how socio-economic disparities, governance deficits, and identity-based conflicts exacerbate conflicts and hinder sustainable peace. Drawing from policy reports, academic publications and case studies, the authors have adopted qualitative content analysis to evaluate current approaches. These include peacekeeping missions, power-sharing agreements, the role of sanctions, and the place of regional organisations in Africa's conflict management design. The findings reveal that while third-party interventions and militaristic responses are frequently used, they only offer short-term relief and fail to address other underlying causes of conflict in the continent such as poverty, political exclusion and bad governance. Therefore, this study argues for the adoption of liberal peace theory as a conflict management approach by leveraging its emphasis on inclusivity, democratic institutions and socio-economic development. The study contributes to the growing literature on conflict resolution and management by recommending actionable measures that can strengthen the continent's resilience to conflicts, foster regional integration and advance reforms in the governance sector. The paper concludes by advocating for proactive conflict management approaches specifically highlighting the relevance of context-specific and collaborative solutions for sustainable peace.

**Key Words:** *Conflict, Peace, APSA, RECs, liberal peace, Africa*

# Introduction

Armed conflicts and violence are some of the most intractable challenges confronting the world and particularly Africa in the 21st century (Gebrewold, 2016; Ismail & Olonisakin, 2021). For Africa, the experiences of conflict are rooted in the continent's historical trajectory, its internal dynamics and interaction with external actors (Okon et al., 2023). The legacies of colonialism, post-independence state formation, governance issues and the struggle between state apparatus and societal forces have left Africa grappling with multiple layers of conflict, insurgencies, socio-economic and political unrest. The consequences of these conflicts have been devastating. On the one hand, they are responsible for hindering development, undermining governance, and on the other hand continue to perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality across the region (Agwanda et al., 2020).

The nature of armed conflicts in Africa today is complex, following a global trend where conflicts are evolving from traditional civil wars to a new spectrum of conflicts such as terrorism, secessionist movements, technological conflicts, ethnic strife and religious radicalisation (Akinola & Liaga, 2023). Indeed, issues such as resource competition, identity politics, poor governance, climate change and external geopolitical interests are seen as the driving forces behind the complexity and intensity of conflict (Francis, 2006; Fagbadebo et al., 2023). A shift in the debate has seen scholars argue that the conflicts being experienced in Africa are not merely a continuation of colonial-era disputes but have transformed into new forms of socio-political struggles shaped by globalisation and neoliberal economic policies (Kaldor, 2013). This perspective underscores the need for innovative conflict management strategies that go beyond conventional militaristic and power-sharing approaches.

In the contemporary era, the nature of conflict in Africa has not only been complex but also diversified. While traditional forms of civil wars and armed insurgencies persist, the region has also seen a rise in secessionist movements, violent extremism, and election-related violence (Koren & Bukari, 2024; Tadesse, 2023). For instance, secessionist campaigns in regions such as Somaliland and Biafra in Nigeria and the quest for independence by the Tuareg in Mali highlight the enduring relevance of self-determination and ethnic nationalism as drivers of conflict (Clapham, 1996). Similarly, the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria (Nyadera et al., 2020), Al-Shabaab in Somalia (Nyadera et al., 2024), and the rise of Islamist militias in the Sahel (Nyadera & Massaoud, 2019) illustrate how religious and ideological factors have reshaped the landscape of violence in Africa (Botha & Abdile, 2014). Election-related violence has also become a significant



trigger of instability, as witnessed in countries such as Kenya (2007/2008), Ivory Coast (2010/2011) and Zimbabwe (2008).

Historically, Africa's internal approaches to conflict management have largely been militaristic, focusing on the deployment of national security forces for counter-insurgency operations and riot control. While effective in the short term, these methods often fail to address the root causes of conflicts, leading to cycles of violence and instability (Williams, 2011; Botha & Graham, 2021). The militaristic approach is also criticized for its heavy-handedness, which frequently exacerbates grievances, fuels resentment among affected communities, and contributes to human rights violations (Tull & Mehler, 2005). At the regional level, the African Union (AU) and the African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) have played a crucial role in conflict management through initiatives such as peacekeeping missions, power-sharing agreements, and sanctions (Onditi et al., 2021; Nyadera, 2024). For example, APSA has facilitated power-sharing deals in countries like Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Sudan and deployed peacekeeping forces in conflict zones such as Darfur, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (African Union, 2014).

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), have also been pivotal in mediating conflicts and ensuring political stability through diplomatic interventions and peace enforcement operations (Adetula et al. et al., 2016). Despite these efforts, sustainable peace remains elusive in many African states.

## **Methodology**

This study relied on qualitative research method with a focus on its content analysis approach to examine conflict management strategies in contemporary Africa. Data used was sourced from policy documents, academic publications, case studies, and reports from international and regional organizations. Information extracted from these sources underwent systematic review to identify unique themes, patterns, and trends in conflict management strategies and dynamics on the continent. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework was used as a guiding tool in the identification (inclusion/exclusion), analysis, and synthesis of the sources. PRISMA was utilized to filter the vast literature on conflict management, especially in Africa. By using PRISMA the authors ensured that the study remained systematic and comprehensive while reducing biases in the selection process.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The Liberal Peace Theory (LPT) offers a framework that emphasizes the importance of building democratic institutions, promoting human rights, and ensuring socio-economic development as prerequisites for sustainable peace (Richmond, 2011). This paradigm advocates for a shift from reactive militaristic interventions to proactive strategies that

address the structural causes of conflict, such as political exclusion, poverty, and lack of social justice. According to proponents of liberal peace, inclusive governance and the promotion of rule of law are essential in transforming conflict-ridden societies into stable democracies (Mac, 2010).

In the context of Africa, the study proposes that adopting a liberal peace approach would entail prioritizing inclusive political processes, enhancing the capacity of regional institutions, and fostering state-society relations that are grounded in dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual respect. This approach also requires a critical examination of the role of external actors and international institutions in supporting African-led peace initiatives without imposing external models that may not align with local realities (Paris, 2004).

Therefore, this provides a comprehensive review of the existing conflict management strategies in Africa, highlight their successes, limitations, and the underlying factors that hinder their effectiveness. By integrating liberal peace arguments with practical solutions tailored to the African context, the article seeks to advance new pathways for achieving sustainable peace and stability on the continent. Through a holistic lens, this study will explore how regional cooperation, strengthened governance frameworks, and inclusive socio-economic policies can transform Africa's approach to conflict management and lay the groundwork for a more peaceful future.

### **The Landscape of Conflict in 21st Century Africa**

To understand the conflict management efforts in Africa, it is important to contextualize the conflict environment in the continent by looking at the types of conflicts experienced in the 21st C. The contemporary conflicts can be traced back to the colonial era when arbitrary borders were drawn, often splitting ethnic groups and creating heterogeneous states with little regard for the social, cultural, or political realities on the ground (Herbst, 2000). These colonial legacies set the stage for post-independence struggles over power and resource control, leading to a plethora of violent conflicts that have continued to plague the continent.

Later, the imposition of centralised governance structures, often characterized by authoritarianism and patrimonial rule, deepened societal divides and disenfranchised large segments of the population (Ake, 1996). In the post-independence period, Africa witnessed a wave of civil wars and armed rebellions, driven by political exclusion, economic marginalization, and ethnic discrimination. Countries such as Sudan, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Angola experienced protracted conflicts that resulted in massive loss of life, displacement, and socio-economic destruction.

Armed insurgencies and rebellions are among the most persistent forms of conflict in Africa, driven by various factors such as political disenfranchisement, ethnic marginalization, and socio-economic inequities. These conflicts are characterized by

organized armed groups challenging the legitimacy and authority of the state, often in pursuit of political or territorial objectives (Harris, 2024; Davies et al., 2023). Insurgencies in Africa by groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, and Al-Shabaab in Somalia, reveal a pattern of militant responses to state failures in providing security, justice, and equitable economic opportunities (Omeje, 2008; Bizău & Stănciulescu, 2022). These groups often exploit local grievances, ethnic cleavages and historical injustices to gain support, positioning themselves as vanguards against state oppression.

The tactics employed by insurgents typically involve asymmetric warfare, including guerrilla tactics, terrorism, and sabotage, aimed at weakening state structures and creating zones of instability (Onamu & Nyadera, 2024). Armed insurgencies tend to be protracted, with insurgents benefiting from weak state control, porous borders, and sometimes external support from diasporic communities or international networks (Weinstein, 2007; Nzau, 2018). The resilience of these groups is further enhanced by the socio-political conditions that facilitate their recruitment, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of educational opportunities, making insurgencies a formidable challenge to peace and stability in Africa (Nzau, 2023; Malone, 2022).

Civil wars and internal conflicts have been a defining feature of Africa's post-independence era, leading to immense human suffering, economic devastation, and political fragmentation (Elbadawi & Sambanis, 2000; Kieh, 2016). Unlike interstate wars, civil conflicts are fought within the boundaries of a state, involving government forces and various non-state actors, including rebel factions, ethnic militias, and even foreign mercenaries. Prominent examples include the civil wars in Sudan, Angola, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where conflicts have been fueled by a mix of political, ethnic, and resource-driven motivations (Collier et al., 2009). These wars often arise from disputes over control of state power, identity-based grievances, and competition for natural resources such as oil, diamonds, and minerals.

The entanglement of political, ethnic, and economic interests in these conflicts has led to cycles of violence that are difficult to break, even with international intervention (Keen, 2005). Civil wars in Africa are not only destructive but also have spillover effects on neighbouring countries, exacerbating regional instability and creating conditions for transnational security threats, such as arms trafficking, refugee flows, and cross-border militant activities.

Secessionist and separatist movements represent another significant type of conflict that has characterised the political environment of Africa (Falola & Thomas, 2020). These movements seek to establish a separate sovereign state or autonomy for a specific region, often based on ethnic, linguistic, or cultural identities (Paalo et. al., 2024). Notable examples include the struggles in Biafra (Nigeria), the English-speaking 'Ambazonia' region of Cameroon, the coastal region of Kenya, the aspirations for

independence in Somaliland, and the ongoing tensions in the Casamance region of Senegal (Clapham, 1998). Such movements are often triggered by perceptions of political and economic marginalization, cultural discrimination, or historical grievances against central governments (Englebert, 2013).

The challenge of managing secessionist movements lies in their potential to undermine national unity and territorial integrity, leading to violent confrontations between state forces and separatist groups. While some movements advocate for their cause through peaceful means and political negotiation, others resort to armed rebellion, leading to protracted conflicts that are resistant to conventional peace processes. These conflicts underscore the failure of post-colonial African states to integrate diverse ethnic and regional identities into a cohesive national framework, further highlighting the fragility of state-society relations on the continent (Herbst, 2000).

Another challenge facing Africa is election-related violence which continues to reflect the deep-rooted issues of political exclusion, corruption, and electoral malpractice (Koko, 2013; Tumba, 2023). Elections, rather than serving as peaceful transitions of power, often become flashpoints for violence, as political elites manipulate ethnic loyalties and mobilize supporters against perceived electoral fraud. Kenya's 2007-2008 post-election violence and the 2010-2011 electoral crisis in Ivory Coast are stark examples of how disputed electoral outcomes can trigger widespread unrest and bloodshed (Cheeseman, 2018). Election-related violence is often exacerbated by the lack of independent electoral commissions, weak judicial systems, and the absence of robust legal frameworks to address electoral grievances (Atuobi, 2008).

The zero-sum nature of African politics, where losing an election is equated with political and economic exclusion, incentivizes the use of violence as a means of securing political leverage or contesting unfavourable outcomes (Cheeseman et. al., 2019). This cycle of violence undermines democratic consolidation and erodes public trust in political institutions, further entrenching authoritarian tendencies and governance deficits across the continent.

## **Root Causes of Conflict in Africa**

The root causes of these conflicts are equally important to understand as they hold the key to the solutions for this conflict. There are several causes of conflict in Africa today some tied to a complex causality ranging from historical, social, political and cultural factors. Understanding the diverse types of conflicts and their root causes is essential for devising effective conflict management strategies in Africa.

Bad governance and corruption are central to the conflict dynamics in Africa, undermining state legitimacy and fuelling widespread discontent (Dan-Woniwei, 2020). Many African states have been plagued by authoritarian regimes, characterized by nepotism, cronyism, and kleptocracy, where political leaders use state resources for personal gain

and to maintain power (Hyden, 2006). Such governance deficits erode public trust in political institutions, diminish the rule of law, and create an environment where political violence and insurgency become viable alternatives for disenfranchised groups. The lack of political inclusivity and transparency further exacerbate tensions, as marginalized groups perceive themselves as being systematically excluded from decision-making processes and economic opportunities (Kłosowicz, 2018). In many cases, political power in Africa is concentrated in the hands of a few elites, often from specific ethnic or regional backgrounds, which leads to the alienation of other communities and the escalation of identity-based conflicts. The failure to address these governance issues continues to be a major impediment to peace and stability on the continent.

Socio-economic disparities in Africa are another cause and a consequence of conflict, perpetuating cycles of poverty, inequality, and exclusion (Fjelde & Østby, 2014). Marginalization and disenfranchisement are particularly pronounced in rural areas and among specific ethnic groups, who often find themselves excluded from the benefits of national development (Mkandawire, 2001). The unequal distribution of wealth and resources, coupled with limited access to education, healthcare, and employment, creates fertile ground for grievances and social unrest. Economic exclusion not only fuels resentment but also drives individuals towards joining armed groups as a means of securing livelihoods and asserting their rights. Insurgent groups and militias frequently capitalize on these socio-economic grievances, recruiting from disenfranchised populations by offering them a sense of purpose, income, and community (Stewart, 2008). Addressing these disparities is critical to breaking the nexus between poverty, exclusion, and conflict in Africa.

Ethnic and religious divisions are also among the most potent drivers of conflict in Africa, often manipulated by political actors to serve their interests. These divisions are deeply rooted in the colonial policy of divide-and-rule, which institutionalized ethnic hierarchies and fostered competition among groups (Lonsdale, 2004). In the post-colonial period, ethnic identities have been politicized, with political elites mobilizing ethnic sentiments to gain electoral support or justify violent campaigns against rivals (Akande, 2024). Religious differences have similarly been exploited, particularly in regions where there are significant Muslim and Christian populations, such as Nigeria and Sudan (Adenuga et al., 2023; Daoud, 2023). Conflicts that initially begin as political or socio-economic grievances are often reframed in religious terms, escalating tensions and polarizing communities along sectarian lines. This manipulation of ethnic and religious identities not only intensifies conflicts but also complicates peace processes, as it embeds grievances into cultural and religious narratives that are resistant to compromise and reconciliation.

### **Contemporary Approaches to Conflict Management in Africa**

Conflict management in Africa has been managed at the national, regional and international levels with mixed results. At the regional level for example, the interventions by Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have had varied levels of effectiveness,

with notable successes in ECOWAS's intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where the deployment of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) forces significantly contributed to peace processes (Adebajo, 2002). Similarly, IGAD's role in mediating the peace agreement in South Sudan and SADC's intervention in Lesotho and the Democratic Republic of Congo illustrate the potential of RECs to manage conflicts through regional diplomacy and military support (Agwanda et al., 2021). However, the contemporary responses and interventions have faced limitations, including lack of political neutrality, resource constraints, overlapping mandates and duplication of roles.

### **Militaristic Responses**

The deployment of National Security Forces has been a common response to armed rebellions and insurgencies in Africa (Lutterbeck, 2013; Royeppen, 2016). States often rely on their military and paramilitary units to quell uprisings, restore order, and regain control of territories occupied by insurgent groups. Examples of such operations can be seen in Nigeria's response to Boko Haram, Kenya's fight against Al-Shabaab, Uganda's efforts against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Ethiopia's military operation against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in the country's Tigray region (Williams, 2016).

While these operations are designed to suppress insurgencies, they are frequently characterized by heavy-handed tactics, including the use of force, aerial bombardments, and mass arrests. Such measures can temporarily destabilize insurgent networks, but they often fail to address the underlying grievances driving the insurgency, leading to their resurgence in different forms. Furthermore, the militarization of conflict zones can exacerbate civilian suffering, with allegations of human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, and forced displacements being rampant in conflict-prone areas (Gates & Podder, 2015).

In response to civil unrest and mass protests, African governments frequently deploy anti-riot police units to suppress demonstrations. This approach aims to maintain public order and prevent protests from escalating into widespread violence or destabilising political crises. Notable instances of anti-riot force deployments include the 2011 Arab Spring-inspired protests in North Africa, as well as post-election demonstrations in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria (Branch & Mampilly, 2015). Anti-riot measures typically involve tear gas, water cannons, rubber bullets, and sometimes live ammunition to disperse crowds. However, such forceful responses can deepen public resentment against the state, intensify opposition movements, and provoke further civil unrest. Moreover, these tactics often blur the line between maintaining law and order and suppressing legitimate political dissent, raising questions about the state's commitment to democratic principles and human rights (Davenport, 2007).

### Third-Party Interventions

The African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) represents a comprehensive framework designed to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts across the continent. APSA's mechanisms include the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Standby Force (ASF), and the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), among others. These instruments are intended to facilitate timely and coordinated responses to crises, promote peacekeeping operations, and foster dialogue among conflicting parties (Vines, 2013).

Power-sharing agreements have been a central element in the AU's conflict resolution strategy, particularly in cases where political violence has resulted from contested elections or civil wars (Vandeginste, 2013). These agreements aim to create inclusive governance structures that accommodate rival factions, thereby diffusing tensions and creating a pathway toward political stability. Examples include the 2008 agreement in Kenya, the 2009 accord in Zimbabwe, and the arrangements in Nigeria, Libya, and South Sudan (Mehler, 2009). While power-sharing can be effective in halting immediate violence, critics argue that it often legitimizes undemocratic practices, rewards violent behavior, and fails to address long-term political and institutional reforms.

The deployment of peacekeeping forces by the AU has been a critical component in stabilising conflict zones, particularly in countries like Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Mali. These missions aim to protect civilians, monitor ceasefires, and support the implementation of peace agreements. However, the effectiveness of these operations is frequently hampered by logistical challenges, inadequate funding, limited troop contributions, and political constraints imposed by host governments (Williams, 2016).

Multinational Joint Taskforces (MNJTs) have been increasingly utilized as a strategy to address transnational threats, such as terrorism and organised crime, which surpass national borders. Such ad hoc security initiatives have also increasingly become a model for peace and security in Africa in what is emerging as security communities in eastern, western, Sahel, Horn of Africa, central and northern Africa. Notable ad hoc security initiatives include the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) with troop contributions from Eastern African countries, the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTf) to counter Boko Haram Islamist insurgency in the Lake Chad region, the Joint Task Force in Mozambique by the southern African states against Ansar Al Sunnah Islamist insurgency, the G5 Sahel Joint Force in the Sahelian region, and the East African Community Regional Force in eastern DRC (Tull, 2017).

The ad hoc security initiatives especially Joint Multinational Taskforces (JMTs) are evolutionary admissions that conflicts are no longer intra-state as they traditionally have been but trans-national or regional hence the need for collective action (Arney & Arney, 2012) on combating terrorism and jihadist insurgencies. The antecedents of JMTs



in Africa are the Regional Coordination Initiative against the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA – 2011 – 2019), and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM 2007 – 2021) in Somalia. While MNJTs provide a platform for regional cooperation, their success depends on sustained political commitment, coordination among member states, and external support from international partners.

The AU and RECs have employed sanctions and embargoes as tools to deter unconstitutional changes of government and target individuals responsible for fuelling conflicts. These sanctions were first adopted during the Lomé Declaration and later the Constitutive Act and the Protocol establishing the of the African Union Peace and Security Council (Namira, 2021). These measures aim to isolate coup leaders and restrict their access to financial resources and international support. Between 2019 and 2023, the AU suspended Sudan (June 2019 and October 2021), Guinea (September 2021), Mali (August 2020), Burkina Faso (January 2022), Gabon (August 2023) and Niger (August 2023) for unconstitutional change of power. Although sanctions have had some success in restoring constitutional order, their implementation often faces challenges due to weak enforcement mechanisms, the persistence of internal political dynamics, and the interests of external actors (Engel & Porto, 2010).

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have emerged as influential actors in Africa's peace and security landscape, complementing the efforts of the AU. Organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have played pivotal roles in conflict mediation, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction (Bach, 2016). Their proximity to conflict zones and understanding of regional dynamics allow them to respond more effectively to crises.

## **Conclusion**

The critical review of conflict management approaches in Africa highlights the successes and failures of current strategies. While power-sharing and peacekeeping have provided temporary solutions, they often fail to address the root causes of conflicts. A holistic approach that includes governance reforms, socio-economic development, and strengthened African institutions is necessary for lasting peace. Future efforts should focus on promoting inclusive governance, fostering state-society relations, and enhancing the capacity of regional mechanisms.

Short-term strategies should focus on conflict de-escalation through dialogue, power-sharing, and peacekeeping. Long-term strategies must emphasize governance reforms, socio-economic development, and building resilient institutions capable of conflict prevention and management. Strengthening APSA and RECs requires increased funding, capacity building, and improved coordination among member states. Establishing robust early warning systems and conflict prevention frameworks is crucial for proactive conflict management.

There is an urgent need for African governments to prioritize inclusive governance and socio-economic development as core components of conflict prevention. Development partners should support these efforts while respecting the sovereignty and self-determination of African states. There is an equally urgent need for governments in Africa to invest in peacebuilding which promotes sustainable peace, through governance practices which fundamentally promote justice, and decentralize power to allow more participation from the public in governance.

Lastly, there is need to further promote electoral and anti-corruption reforms, because these two issues of governance have broken democracy and public trust in Africa and inspired perpetual power struggles as well as grievance which entrench conflict in the region.

## **Recommendations**

The Liberal Peace Theory dates back to Kant (1795) and President Woodrow Wilson (1917) and has since evolved and become the centre of academic and policy debates. Its advocates (Hensel et al., 2000), call for democracy, human rights, and market-based economic reforms as foundations for achieving sustainable peace. In the African context, this theory is relevant as it addresses the structural issues driving conflicts, such as political exclusion, lack of economic opportunities, and weak institutions.

Domestically, promoting democratic values and governance reforms can help mitigate the root causes of conflicts and create conducive environments for peace (Paris, 2004). Inclusive governance that ensures representation of all societal groups is key to preventing conflicts. Building democratic institutions that are accountable and transparent can foster political stability and reduce the appeal of armed rebellion. Efforts to reform electoral processes, strengthen judicial independence, and promote civic engagement are essential steps towards achieving this goal (Collier, 2009). Electoral reforms bear a significant positive impact on political stability and public trust in governing institutions and processes. Nearly all regional countries have been faced with electoral controversies involving allegations of election rigging, manipulation and interference by incumbents as well as the lack of independence of electoral bodies (functional and institutional) from political control. Such reforms will restore the legitimacy and credibility required to have peaceful elections and democratic transitions in Africa.

In fact, multipartyism should be promoted due to its ability to open up political space for competition of ideas and values as well as policies in governance. The competition and inclusive approaches improve the quality of laws, policies, as well as governance processes, approaches and outcomes. The model of multipartyism further ensures equal and inclusive representation of sections of the public with divergent political persuasions including minorities especially in ethnically divided societies such as those in the Horn of Africa (Ndikumana, 2023).

However, multipartyism in the region is threatened by dominant political parties and ethnic-based political mobilization. Dominant parties such as the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) in Tanzania, National Resistance Movement (NRM) in Uganda, and Prosperity Party in Ethiopia. South Sudan's Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) was a dominant party until 2013 civil war broke out and splintered it into SPLM In Government (SPLM-IG) and SPLM In Opposition (SPLM-IO). Sudan's National Congress Party (NCP) was also dominant until the popular revolution removed it from power in 2019.

In addition, socio-economic development is crucial in addressing the underlying grievances that lead to conflicts. Investing in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and job creation can reduce poverty and inequality, which are often exploited by insurgent groups to recruit disenfranchised individuals. A holistic development strategy that targets marginalized communities can help build resilience against conflict (Sen, 1999).

We advocate for decentralization as a strategy to better distribute power and resources, particularly in countries that are divided by ethnicity and pluralism and plagued by marginalization (Kanyinga, 2016). This is because such divisions in the society are often accompanied by unequal power relations between social groups with certain groups holding the advantage over power and resources and marginalizing others. The net effects are unequal development, poor democratic standards and the constant risk of conflict inspired by state-society tensions. Decentralization will ensure peace by advancing democracy and development by giving citizens more power at the local levels and increasing their involvement in governance by fostering public participation (Kanyinga, 2016).

Our proposal to cure the current reliance on reactionary approaches, there is need to further invest in peacebuilding by centralizing questions of peace and justice in governance practices in Africa. The regional governments should appreciate that peace and justice are not only mutually reinforcing but also enables development. Governments should strive to identify the foundations of conflict and address the questions of grievance as a driver of conflict thereof. Balkelis(2020: 912-913) argues that violence is an expression of conflict and a function of violent power relations from which grievance can be identified. Implicitly, violence is the struggle between the expression of grievances and suppression of such expression in the preservation of status quo (power and wealth) in contexts of civil wars or insurgencies.

Violence is therefore driven by constituencies of interest as opposed to mere ethnic identity and ideological pursuits (not to deny their influence on conflict). The approach to deliberately address injustice will ensure inclusivity for minority groups and excluded regions and groups, historical injustices are addressed, equitable resource and opportunity distribution and access respectively, among other outcomes which entrench peace and sustainably prevent or resolve conflicts by addressing root causes and legitimate grievances.

Regional governments should strengthen the fight against corruption not just as a governance and development agenda, but also as a sustainable strategy of ensuring peace and stability. The most stable and peaceful countries in the world have adopted as public policy the drive to “clean” the public sector by institutionalizing and bureaucratizing accountability, as well as the ethical and integrity systems. The fight to reduce or eliminate corruption, especially in the public sector, is a test that has failed many countries in the developing world.

In developing countries, corruption remains one of the main challenges to good governance, social services, rule of law, democracy, realization of human rights, political accountability and transparency, and economic development (Mbao & Komboni, 2008). Such effects of corruption result from the defunding of the welfare systems and corrosion of ethical standards in the public sector. However, many such countries in the developing world have failed to achieve significant anti-corruption reforms and objectives. The failure to achieve anti-corruption reforms, as Meagher (2005) argues, is common in poorly governed countries with less democratic and accountable political systems.

To improve conflict resolution in Africa, it is essential to enhance the capacity of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and RECs. This includes increasing financial resources, improving coordination among member states, and fostering partnerships with international organisations. Strengthening these institutions' ability to conduct peacekeeping and mediation will enable them to respond more effectively to conflicts (Vines, 2013). At the regional level, there is a need to push for regional integration. Given Africa's diverse security threats, integration and regionalization efforts have become an opportunity to ensure sustainable economic growth, peace and stability, and opportunity for the consolidation of democracy in Africa (Wachira, 2004).

Regional economic integration in Africa is part of a global trend towards regionalism, aimed at promoting economic growth in participating countries. This process pools human and material resources, exploits economies of scale, facilitates technology transfer with foreign investment, and facilitates market integration. Therefore, it is expected the largest economic integration project in the region, the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will produce not only distributional effects in participating countries but also cumulative positive effects such as peace, security and development (Fofack & Mold, 2021). Besides the improvement of incomes, reduction of economic inequalities and improvement in standards of life in Africa which create peace within states, regional (economic) integration stands to have perhaps the biggest positive impact on regional cooperation in Africa and subsequently peace across the region.

Developing robust early warning systems is critical for preventing conflicts before they escalate. These systems should be based on comprehensive data collection and analysis of potential flashpoints, allowing for timely interventions. Integrating local knowledge and community insights into these frameworks can enhance their accuracy

and effectiveness in conflict prevention (Adelphi, 2017). Building trust between the state and society is essential for sustainable peace. Grassroots dialogue and reconciliation initiatives can help bridge the gap between communities and government authorities. These efforts should focus on acknowledging past injustices, promoting forgiveness, and creating platforms for continuous engagement (Lederach, 1997). Furthermore, addressing the grievances of marginalized groups requires targeted socio-economic policies and political reforms. Ensuring equitable distribution of resources, improving access to public services, and enhancing political representation of disenfranchised communities are vital steps towards fostering social cohesion and reducing conflict potential (Francis, 2006).

The international community plays a crucial role in supporting African-led conflict resolution initiatives. Development partners should provide financial aid, technical expertise, and diplomatic backing to strengthen African institutions. However, this support must be aligned with local priorities and respect the sovereignty of African states to avoid undermining indigenous conflict resolution efforts (Zartman, 1995). While international involvement is important, it must be balanced with respect for African sovereignty. External actors should avoid imposing solutions that do not align with local realities. Instead, they should facilitate African ownership of the peace processes, ensuring that interventions are context-specific and culturally sensitive (Menkhaus, 2010).

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# Artificial Intelligence and Regional Security in Africa: Examining Africa's Role in the Global Technological Security Agenda

**Esther Kibe**  
**Sekou Otondi**

## **Abstract**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionised the aspect of global security, redefining national security and the ability of states to effectively protect their citizens. AI-driven technology has become a double-edged sword. On one hand, AI has enhanced threat detection through intelligence analysis and operational effectiveness while on the other hand, it has challenged the very basic principle of national security in terms of access, authentication, authorisation and accountability in its access and usage. Particularly, the adoption of AI has posed ethical and strategic challenges, such as algorithmic bias, misuse by adversaries, and legal ambiguities. In addition, it has the potential to be used as a tool for misinformation and disinformation. Employing qualitative research design while utilising desktop research methods to analyse existing literature, this paper, therefore, seeks to evaluate Africa's role and strategies for meaningful engagement in the global AI-security discourse. It focuses on enhancing regional security while addressing challenges posed by AI and technological inequalities, that influence the security landscape across the continent. Hence, the study is guided by the regional security complex Theory (RSCT), which argues that security threats often take a regional dimension, advocating for regional collaboration in security measures. The study concludes that AI continuously shapes global security and redefines regional and national security. Therefore, the integration of AI into regional and national security frameworks continues to redefine strategies and tools employed to safeguard states in the 21st century. This has impacted the continent both positively and negatively due to its low capacity to invest in technological innovation. However, the continent doesn't have to reinvent the wheel but needs to position existing innovations while developing new technological innovations that suit its economic, military and political security needs.

**Keywords:** *National Security, African agency, Artificial Intelligence, cyber security, resilience, information security*

# Introduction

The rapidly changing nature of technology is constantly redefining the traditional national security perspective; this calls on states to employ different strategies to safeguard their territorial integrity and protect their interests. Artificial Intelligence emerging threats can undermine their existence and disrupt their social, political and economic systems. However, AI technologies also offer great opportunities for states to explore ways to boost their national security.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative field, increasingly shaping global security strategies. Major players, including China, Russia, and the United States, view AI as pivotal to national and international security, making it key in their security strategies (Roberts, 2021). China's 2017 strategy, for instance, aims for global AI leadership to monetise AI into a trillion Yuan (150 dollars) and be the driving force in defining norms and standards for AI (China Development Report, 2018). Russia emphasises AI's potential to dominate geopolitical power. In its digital Economic program, it formed a sub-commission in 2019 to oversee the National Strategy on AI development (Edmonds, et al.). This strategy was pitched to plan and execute Russia's government AI program by 2030, towards achieving AI global leadership in research, software development, data management and regulation (Markotkin & Chernenko, 2020).

The U.S., on the other hand, through initiatives like Project Maven, integrates AI for military operations, showcasing its role in modernising combat strategies through advanced artificial intelligence and emphasising its role and power in winning future warfare (US Department of Defense, 2018). Under its 2018 National Defence Strategy Project Maven, formally known as the Algorithmic Warfare Cross-Functional Team, leverages machine learning and data fusion technologies to analyse multi-source data for military applications. Its functions include target identification, data visualisation, and transmitting human decisions to weapon systems via a user interface (Marcus, 2017). Indeed, AI has become a global priority and holds significant potential as a transformative tool for African states to realise Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (African Union, 2024). In addition, It offers opportunities for the continent to develop its capabilities for regional security and be a continent that can foster innovation.

Recognising the great opportunity offered by IA, the African Union hosted a significant meeting titled "Shaping Africa's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Future: Strategies for Inclusive and Collaborative National AI Policy Development" (African Union, 2024) on August 20,

2024, in Addis Ababa. The event emphasised the importance of harmonised AI strategies across Africa to harness AI's transformative potential for socio-economic advancement.

This collaboration aims to foster inclusivity and innovation, laying the groundwork for AI policies that align with the continent's unique security and developmental priorities (AUDA-NEPAD, 2024). This highlights a commitment to achieving ethical and equitable AI development as it advocates for harmonised national policies among AU Member States, emphasising collaboration to ensure Africa's leadership in inclusive, responsible AI-driven technologies in the continent.

The challenge that faces the continent is limited investment in R&D, which poses a significant challenge to its capacity for AI innovation, leaving Africa at risk of being marginalised in global AI technology (Abdessalam, 2023). This underinvestment could impede the continent's ability to address region-specific AI needs effectively and its security agenda. The PWC (2017) report indicates that while AI development remains in its nascent stages globally, regions such as Europe, North America, and China have significantly advanced AI markets. In comparison, Africa's financial gains from AI are projected at \$1.2 trillion, while China, North America, and Northern Europe stand at \$7.0 trillion, \$3.7 trillion, and \$1.8 trillion, respectively. These disparities highlight the continent's challenge in advancing AI development and harnessing its transformative potential in society by integrating AI into other forms of a state's power capabilities (PWC, 2017).

Focusing on the African continent, this paper, therefore, seeks to examine how AI is continuously shaping the global security agenda and redefining regional and national security strategies. The questions it seeks to address are; how can Africa meaningfully engage in the global AI-security architecture, while addressing its unique vulnerabilities and leveraging AI for national and regional security? Secondly, what are the unique challenges faced by the continent and opportunities that present for Africa to leverage AI for aspects such as conflict prevention, peacebuilding and resource management towards a stable continent? In this regard, the paper aims to look at the conceptualisation, normalisation, and theorising of Artificial Intelligence within the context of the broader global security agenda that characterises international relations among states. More specifically, evaluating Africa's role and strategies for meaningful engagement in the global AI-security discourse, with a focus on enhancing regional security and addressing technological inequalities.

## **Conceptualizing Artificial Intelligence and Regional Security in Africa**

Artificial Intelligence was first coined at a workshop at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire in 1956 (William, 2003). However, artificial intelligence began to take a more prominent role in the first decade of the 21st century. The proliferation of Artificial

Intelligence in the 21st century can be attributed to three major issues which included the emergence of an enormous amount of data engines, an increase in machine learning techniques, and computer processing power (Haenlen & Kaplan, 2019).

Kurzweil (1990) conceptualises Artificial Intelligence as the art of creating machines that perform functions that require intelligence when otherwise performed by people. This definition in essence provides an understanding of AI as a system that behaves as humans. However, Zhang & Dafoe (2019) define Artificial Intelligence as a discipline that involves the study of machines that are capable of sophisticated information processes in ways that are capable of automating, increasing upon, or simply scaling up critical human skills in the form of predictions and decision-making.

While examining AI and regional security, it is essential to evaluate the understanding of security from a national security perspective. Traditionally, national security has been seen to inform states' security strategies. National security is seen as the protection and preservation of a nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and citizens from external and internal threats, focusing more on military defence (Marxsen, 2015).

While threats remain associated with military defence, the International security dynamics have morphed into consideration of non-military dimensions such as economic stability, environmental protection, and cyber security as crucial security threats, reflecting a broader understanding of what constitutes security in contemporary times (Kushal, 2023). This multidimensional approach underscores the gradual shift of national security from purely issues of 'hard politics' to 'soft politics.' A secure nation is not only where its citizens experience safety from military threats but also safeguarded from economic instability, social unrest, cyber threats, and environmental crises. Hence, contemporary national security threats extend beyond conventional warfare to issues such as terrorism, cyberattacks, and transnational organised crime (Brown & Green, 2019).

It is therefore crucial to highlight how the concept of security evolved after the Cold War, transitioning toward a more regional focus. After the Cold War, regional dynamics became the driving force behind international relations. The growing importance of this regional approach stems from the realisation that national interests can't be pursued in isolation; they require collaboration within the broader regional context (Al-Jader & Jaafar, 2022). Countries have come to understand that their stability and prosperity are deeply intertwined with their neighbours' well-being. Challenges that may seem local don't stop at national borders; they spill over and impact entire regions. So, achieving national success now means recognising that what happens next door matters just as much as what happens at home" (Mosbah, 2017).

Analyzing artificial intelligence (AI) within global and regional security frameworks necessitates a multifaceted, collaborative approach. While AI has the potential to



strengthen states' defensive resilience, its dual-use nature simultaneously amplifies regional insecurities. These dynamics underscore the urgent need for robust governance frameworks and cooperative security strategies to address emerging threats effectively (Kolade & Titilayo Modupe, 2024). These threats encompass but are not limited to, cyberattacks and information warfare.

Acknowledging that Africa may lag behind regions such as the United States, China, and Western Europe in terms of advanced AI technology, the global competition for AI dominance has significantly affected the continent, particularly in the context of rapid globalisation. The securitisation of AI by these leading nations introduces complex challenges for Africa, as AI-driven security threats can contribute to regional instability and expose multiple states to interconnected security vulnerabilities within both regional and global frameworks.

Consequently, African states need to cooperate at the regional and international levels to develop AI governance architecture to mitigate the complex security challenges that cut across the territorial borders of individual states (Oyande, 2024). More so, given that more advanced AI powers are at the forefront of shaping global technological norms, Africa needs to adopt AI governance as part of the wider global security agenda. (Kolade & Titilayo, 2024).

## Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilising desktop research methods to analyse existing literature, policy documents and legal provisions in relation to AI and security. Hence, the qualitative research design is better situated at enhancing exploratory research aimed at uncovering patterns, themes, and insights in the existing body of knowledge around AI and regional security. Data collection involved a comprehensive review of scholarly works, reports, and legal provisions, relevant to the topic.

Data was analysed using a thematic approach, identifying key themes, patterns, and insights from the collected sources. Through iterative examination and comparison of the data, emerging themes and trends are identified, providing a vast understanding of the nexus between AI and related aspects of national and regional security. Given the

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dynamic nature of technology around AI vis a vis its integration into security frameworks, desktop research allows the study to remain flexible to emerging areas of knowledge between AI and security.

Thus, this paper can enrich both policy and the knowledge gap in the area of AI, as well as national and regional security frameworks, when reviewed together with other resources. The main possible bias with the applied methodology is regarding the selection of sources. While deliberate measures were made to ensure the most academic and relevant sources are used for the discourse, some of the literature selected might be skewed towards a specific agenda set by the authors depending on their perspectives. Therefore, to mitigate this, triangulation of data from multiple sources helped corroborate findings and mitigate bias, while the research process enhanced transparency and reproducibility.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper was guided by the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. It emphasises how regional dynamics shape security. In their seminal work, *"Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security"* Buzan and Weaver (2003) examine security from a regional perspective pointing out that the traditional understandings of security, which narrowly pays attention to state security with an overemphasis on military threats, are inadequate in the understanding of evolving contemporary security concerns. On this basis, military security then becomes, just one but, other main forms of security, such as political and economic security (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

The concept of a security complex, therefore, refers to a set of states whose core security concerns are so interconnected that their national security dynamics cannot be assessed independently (Burgess, 2021). This interconnectedness suggests that the security policies and interests of these nations are intrinsically linked (Koch & Stivachtis, 2019). The term also denotes a cluster of entities within which significant security interactions occur, where processes of securitisation and desecuritisation are so interwoven that security issues must be examined collectively rather than in isolation (Mosbah, 2012)

This security theorisation is closely in line with the 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) emphasis on human security, which emphasises individual security, such as protecting individuals from violence, poverty, disease, and environmental hazards (UNDP, 2019).

RSCT emphasises the traditional notion of protection of state sovereignty encompassing aspects of human security, making it a more meaningful and applicable theoretical framework for analysing the nexus between AI and Security in Africa. This is due to the broader application of AI in almost all aspects of security, from regional security and state security to individual security. Consequently, states would require regional actions

and efforts to mitigate shared threats towards examining opportunities and challenges that are present within the realm of AI.

As highlighted by Abdessalam (2023), AI technologies can enhance regional capacity to address non-traditional security threats like terrorism and cyberattacks. This will call for regional cooperation to enhance conflict prevention and improve crisis response on the continent. In addition, RSCT provides a lens for looking at the connection of AI to Africa's security beyond the regional to a broader global context (Buchanan,2024). This is primarily due to the increasingly interwoven nature of Africa's security challenges and opportunities brought about by AI to the broader global advancement in AI technology.

## **Africa's Role in Global AI and Regional Security: Exploring Africa's Contribution to Technological Security Frameworks.**

### ***Africa's Global Technological Security Agenda***

The international political system in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is likely to be dominated by state and non-state actors who are masters of cutting-edge scientific and technological innovations. Masters of AI are, by and large, dominant in the international political system. The fungible nature of AI makes it capable of being integrated with other scientific and technological innovations to complement the main traditional power capabilities that have defined nation-states such as the military, economic, and political power.

In essence, despite the majority still grappling with the provision of fundamental basic public goods and services to their citizens, African governments need to prioritise policies that aim at accelerating the development of science and technology. This is because AI cannot be ignored if any nation-state aims to enhance its agency in the prevailing and future international political systems. Moving forward, AI promises to continue playing a critical role with regard to developments in the military, economic, and political global agendas. Therefore, AI is a tool for enhancing the existing and potential power capabilities of nation-states to propel them to dominance. By acquiring high-tech innovations and adaptations of AI, a nation-state is better placed to dominate world politics and economies (Aker & Mbiti,2010).

However, there has been a need to challenge this misconception as Africa steadily progresses with scientific and technological innovations aimed at improving lives. A notable advance is mobile phone technology, which has transformed socio-economic and political lives across Africa (Aker & Mbiti,2010). Technological applications have also been aimed at enhancing security across all sectors, such as political conflict, famine and drought early warning systems. The early warning systems, such as *Ushahidi*, have seen *crowdsourcing of information with the aim of early warning in security hotspots that, in effect, trigger an early response* (Rotich, 2017). The fact that AI is likely to continue transforming power relations between actors in the international political system requires

an interrogation of its impact on Africa's political, military, and economic security within the context of the global technological security agenda.

### **Africa's agency in AI international security frameworks.**

Africa's contributions to global AI governance are becoming more significant, yet the continent's representation in international security AI frameworks remains limited. This highlights a significant marginality in the global landscape where Africa is regarded as a consumer or as having a limited contributor role rather than leadership in global AI advancement (Gwagwa et al., 2020).

The contribution of Africa to AI governance is evidenced through initiatives like the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy and the African Data Governance Framework, both of which place importance on ethical AI use and set regulatory standards suited to the continent's unique security challenges (African Union, 2020). In addition, the African Group on Artificial Intelligence, which works to shape global AI policy, advocates for equitable development and the use of AI for sustainable development goals. However, despite these significant contributions, Africa's representation in international security discussions, particularly those involving AI and cybersecurity, remains at the periphery (Amani Africa, 2024), reflecting broader structural challenges and unequal global dynamics.

As highlighted by Gwagwa et. al. (2022), despite AI technologies holding significant potential for enhancing security, economic, and social outcomes on the continent, African nations often lack sufficient inclusion in global AI policy discussions and decision-making forums. In addition, Africa's agency and representation in main global forums such as the United Nations and the Global Partnership on AI remain limited. This undermines Africa's voice in decision-making that influences the continent's nexus between security and IA technology (Melody, 2024).

Africa's involvement in global AI governance must reflect the continent's priorities while considering the broader international landscape. In addition, African participation in global AI governance should transcend symbolic representation. Hence, African perspectives must play a substantive role in shaping AI policies to ensure these technologies foster socio-economic development across the continent (Melody, 2024). This can only be realised when African states position themselves

**African participation in global AI governance should transcend symbolic representation. Hence, African perspectives must play a substantive role in shaping AI policies to ensure these technologies foster socio-economic development across the continent**

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to strategically shape AI policies in a manner that creates value and promotes social and economic development (Erastus,2021)

## **Challenges and Opportunities for AI in African Regional Security**

### *Artificial Intelligence and Political Security In Africa*

The role of Artificial Intelligence poses both opportunities and risks for Africa in political security. The major opportunities have mainly been seen with the mapping of conflict hotspots before and during political strife. This has mainly been done through early warning and response innovations that act as cloud-sourcing measures to identify individuals and communities at risk.

In Africa, some early warning innovations that have been developed include and not limited to "ushahidi" which means "testimony" (Rotich 2017). The technology was developed during Kenya's deadliest post-election violence in 2007-2008 and has been adopted and used across the globe. The Ushahidi civic tech platform mainly enhances election monitoring, crisis and emergency response, as well as civic engagement and community building (Rotich 2017). Ushahidi is used to reach out to the people at the grassroots levels.

It has also transformed and enhanced political participation of ordinary citizens in the decision-making process as well as preventing the escalation of conflict through effective early warning systems. A significant limitation of utilising AI technology on such platforms is the prevalence of misinformation and fake news, which necessitates verification often challenging to achieve in real time. For instance, during the 2019 Nigerian elections, widespread misinformation proliferated through AI-driven platforms, a pattern frequently observed during electoral cycles. Such misinformation distorts public discourse and misleads voters, thereby hindering their ability to make informed decisions. This, in turn, undermines the fundamental principles of democracy by compromising the integrity of free and fair electoral processes (AI Jazeera, 2023).

While the use of AI technology to spread misinformation poses a global threat to democratic processes, the risk is particularly acute in Africa. This heightened vulnerability stems from the continent's highly polarised political environments and the relative fragility of its nascent democratic institutions. These institutions often lack the resilience needed to absorb the potential fallout and mitigate the aftershocks of divisive political campaigns that characterise many electoral cycles. As a result, the impact of AI-driven misinformation can be more destabilising, undermining efforts to foster stable democratic governance.

For example, the development of AI, especially concerning the misuse of data by big data mining companies, continues to negatively impact democracy not only in Africa but across the globe. The threat of political instability in Africa feeds into the wider global context as

most of these technological firms are from outside the continent (AUDA-NEPAD,2024). According to Lynch et al,(2023), the involvement of these foreign data companies might represent a new form of neo-colonialism in Africa where their motivation is the need to make profits.

While the use of propaganda in electoral processes has long been a prevalent strategy, the advent of sophisticated algorithms that covertly target voters has significantly amplified the potential for manipulation. This technological development raises concerns regarding the violation of individuals' data privacy rights, as voters may be influenced without their informed consent.

Moreover, the involvement of multinational technology corporations highlights the evolving challenges to traditional national security frameworks. Powerful non-state actors increasingly leverage the pervasive nature of artificial intelligence, posing a threat to the sovereign right of citizens to choose their leaders freely (Ünver, 2024). This dynamic further complicates the concept of state sovereignty in international relations, as external entities can potentially undermine democratic processes and national integrity (Korinek & Stiglitz, 2021).

In response to the challenges and opportunities presented by artificial intelligence in the realm of political security, the African Governance Architecture (AGA) has initiated efforts to establish collaborative frameworks and regional policy initiatives. These initiatives aim to address the increasing interconnection between AI technology and cybersecurity, fostering a cohesive approach to mitigating emerging threats and enhancing regional stability. This can be evidenced by the 2014 African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, known as the Malabo Convention, which provides a legal framework for African nations to enhance their cybersecurity and data protection measures (African Union, 2014).

This convention provides steps towards governance structures and institutions within member states and, subsequently, towards a common regional framework of cooperation on regional cybersecurity to protect against cyber threats and AI technology-related challenges. This is expected to reduce political insecurity by addressing the potential for data manipulation by data mining companies. However, despite these initial efforts, the continent continues to face significant challenges, driven by disparities in technological preparedness and political stability across its diverse regions.

### **Artificial Intelligence and Military Security In Africa**

Within the broader global context, Artificial Intelligence has emerged as a key area of concern with regard to the industrial-military complex. The ultimate goal of states towards integrating AI with traditional military hardware, such as nuclear arms and other conventional weapons, is the consolidation of national power to sustain an edge over other countries with regard to military might (Rafiq,2021). This can partly explain the

ballooning of global military spending in 2023, which stood at \$2.4 trillion, the highest since the end of the Cold War period, according to the 2024 Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute SIPRI report on global military spending budgets (SIPRI, 2024).

The SIPRI 2024 report highlights a clear correlation between military spending by global powers and the pursuit of AI dominance (SIPRI, 2024). China and the United States, which together accounted for nearly half of global military expenditures in 2023, are leading this competitive landscape. Their rivalry is exemplified by the ongoing "AI chip wars," reflecting broader technological tensions (The Economist, 2018). While this competition is framed as technological advancement, it is closely tied to military-industrial innovations to strengthen national security for both nations.

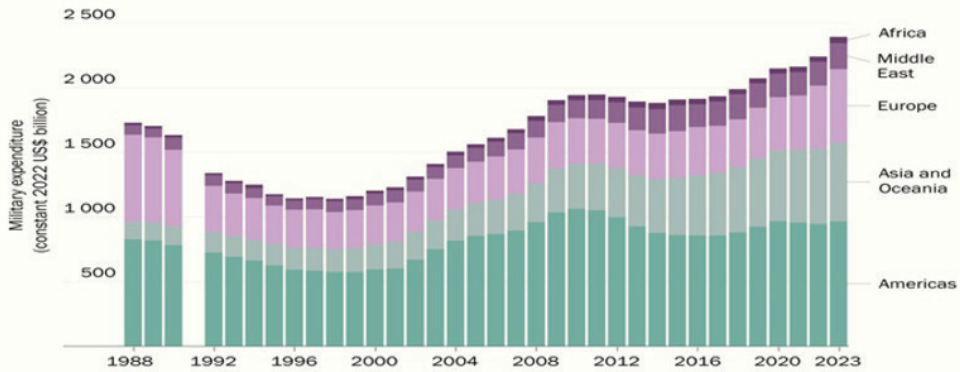
Therefore, this need for powerful states to balance power within the context of the AI supremacy race provides critical empirical evidence of the evolving significance of the industrial military technology complex. According to Horowitz (2010), the potential response by a state to a major military innovation by another state is often in two forms - internal and external. Internal responses often involve two options: either adopting the innovation or attempting to counter the innovation. The external response has three options, which are: the state without the new technology becoming neutral, balancing with another state which adopts the new technology against the first state to develop new technology, or bandwagoning with the state that was the first to adopt the new technology (Horowitz, 2010).

Hence, with the advancement in technology and innovations, the international system is likely to witness an increase in the number of the above scenarios as states upgrade their arsenals with modern AI innovations, not only as a policy of prestige but in line with national security, more so with regard to the traditional neorealism's notion of security of the state as the most important aspect of states' existence in anarchic international system (Mearsheimer, 2001). Based on the prevailing nature of the international system, states are often bound to maximise their power. Therefore, AI and its application to existing or upgrading a state's military security provides a clear pathway for enhancing national security



## World military expenditure grows for the ninth consecutive year to reach all-time high

Spending increased by 6.8 per cent in real terms in 2023, which was the steepest year-on-year rise since 2009.



Note: The absence of data for the Soviet Union in 1991 means that no total can be calculated for that year.  
Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, Apr. 2024.

www.sipri.org  
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**Figure 1:** World military expenditure, 2023, SIPRI Report 2024

According to Boulanin (2018), the inclusion of AI in the realm of advanced military hardware, such as nuclear technology, could potentially instigate an arms race between nuclear and non-nuclear armed nation-states due to security dilemmas (Boulanin, 2018). The consequences of integrating AI into nuclear weapons and the subsequent arms race, whether accidental or intentional, means that Africa is likely to be left exposed to manipulation by countries with advanced military capabilities akin to what happened during the Cold War era.

This, in the end, will more likely make Africa once again a theatre of proxy wars between existing and emerging global hegemonic powers hell-bent on testing their weaponised AI technologies (Chatham et.al, 2018). The presence of major global powers - such as the United States, China and Russia have all applied the use of varied forms of AI-assisted military technology in various conflicts across the continent (Stevens, 2020). This has especially been so in regions where the major powers have some form of strategic interests, such as the United States use of AI-assisted technologies, such as drones, in counterterrorism and surveillance operations in Somalia against Al-Shabab and other parts of Africa (Miller, 2020).

While currently, Africa seems to have the short end of the stick when it comes to opportunities surrounding military security, there is potential that might be beneficial to the military security challenges the continent faces. One of the critical areas in which AI can enhance Africa's military security at the national and regional level is pathways

to peace, especially in post-conflict regions (Stevens, 2020) For instance, there is a possibility of deploying AI-assisted drones for humanitarian aid in far-flung regions. For example, UN peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have considered using AI-assisted drones for surveillance and logistical support in conflict management (Stevens, 2020).

This integration can improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations and reduce civilian harm. However, there also exist challenges to this approach to peacekeeping as there is a likelihood of confusion between armed drones by combatants and unarmed drones for humanitarian aid, in addition to privacy issues due to surveillance (Keuleers, 2017). These challenges thus warrant the need for the African Union and Regional Blocs/ Mechanism to develop governance systems that could enhance the ethical use of AI in military use for both combat and peaceful resolutions of conflicts. While peacekeeping is a major aspect of deploying AI military technology to address challenges of peace and security in Africa, other aspects include predictive analytics to prevent conflict as well as the use of the military for logistics and monitoring the flow of resources in remote regions across the continent (Peace & Security Council, 2024).

Therefore, in the short term, given the greater extent of Africa's shortcomings in the field of AI and military technology, Africa's nation-states will have to adapt to external responses that involve either or all these three options: bandwagon, stay neutral in the face of new military technological powerhouses, or balance with other states with superior military capabilities ( UN,2024)

Africa's strategic advantage lies in its potential to leverage abundant natural resources critical for the development of advanced AI technologies. By adopting strategic measures, the continent can use these resources to enhance its influence within the global technological security landscape. However, the long-term potential hinges on substantial investments in research and development with a dual focus on both civilian and military AI applications. This approach could significantly strengthen Africa's agency, fostering technological self-reliance and positioning the continent as an influential player in global AI advancements.

### **Artificial Intelligence and Economic Security in Africa**

Artificial intelligence has a critical role to play in Africa's economic growth and development, posing both opportunities and risks for the continent. This will significantly depend on how policymakers across Africa's nation-states position themselves in the wider international political and economic system. To reiterate the significance of AI to the global economy, it is important to conceptualise Kai-Fu-Lee's statement during the last World Economic Forum, in which he estimated that AI was likely to produce between \$ 13 and 17 trillion dollars incremental global Gross Domestic Product over the next 11 years (Tech Crunch, 2019).

Nevertheless, this wealth is more likely to be accumulated in the United States and China as well as other developed countries which have mastered the use of technology, as opposed to developing countries such as Africa where AI is still nascent, further perpetuating global economic inequality between the global north and global south countries (Alonso & Rehman, 2020). The fact that developing countries have a wider supply of cheap routine labour that machines can easily replace is likely to widen unemployment levels globally, but more acutely in Africa. This is due to the fact that reshoring, where jobs previously done in developing countries due to cheap labour, are being moved to wealthy developed nations due to increased AI technology, as automation makes labour even much cheaper in developed countries (World Economic Forum, 2023)

According to a 2016 UNCTAD report, it is estimated that up to two-thirds of low-wage jobs in developing countries are threatened by robotics (Mayer, 2018). This will likely leave developing countries more exposed as markets and dumping sites for cheaper goods from developed countries. African economies should emulate other developing countries that have begun to build regulatory structures for e-commerce (Susan, 2018). This will ensure that rule-making standards concerning data collection are not skewed against Africa as global trade evolves around the e-commerce platforms as illustrated below:

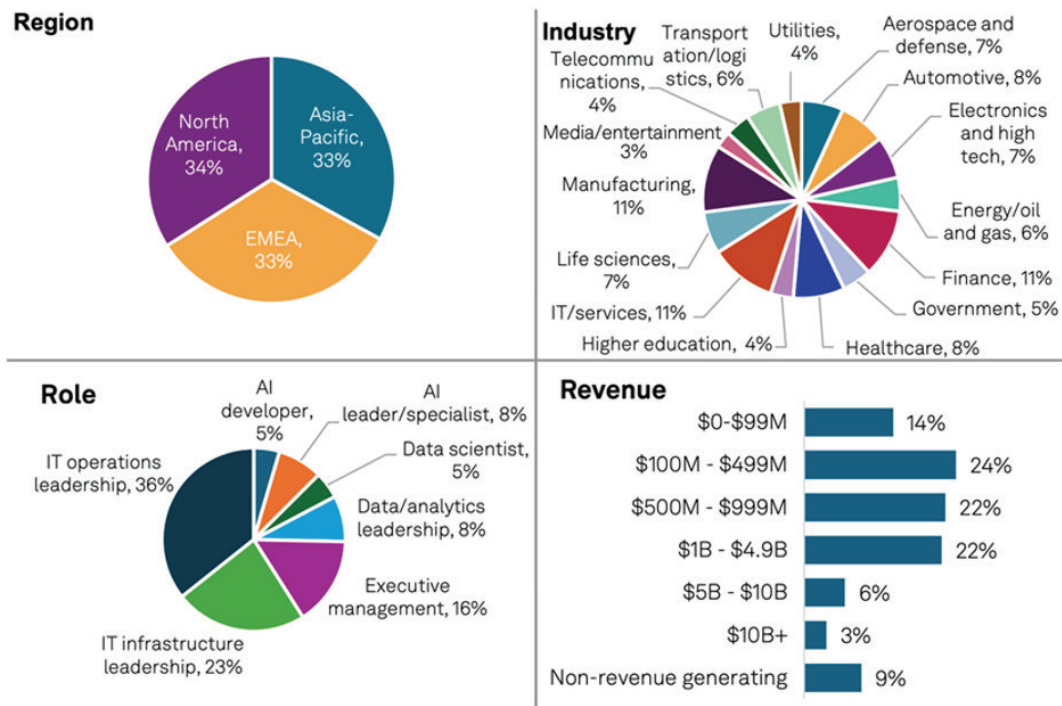


Figure 2: Survey of North America, Europe, Middle East and Africa Q4 2024

In the long run, unemployment due to machine-intensive labour is likely to exacerbate other socio-political tensions, such as risks of increased political instability and further migration crises. Therefore, to avoid the loss of jobs and revenue due to robots, African economies can diversify their economic sectors that require less automation, such as tourism, while nurturing AI technologies for routine jobs. Investment by African economies in AI should be driven by specialisation in specific niche technological areas in line with the global value chains that continue to shape global manufacturing and trade. Furthermore, developing countries should formulate new tax regimes on how to tax machines that have replaced human labour (Delaney, 2017). In the long term, this will mitigate revenue loss needed by governments for the provision of public goods and services.

Nevertheless, for Africa, the emergence of technology should not be viewed as casting a spell of doom on economic growth and development. In the agricultural sector, for instance, which is the mainstay of most African economies, AI can be used to enhance productivity and add value to agricultural produce, as well as ease searching and monitoring trends in the domestic and export markets for farm produce. The use of Nuru technology in fighting armyworms, for instance, was introduced by the Food and Agricultural Organization and has gone a long way in improving crop yield for farmers across Kenya (FAO Report, 2018).

The technology works by detecting worm invasions, thus providing farmers with opportunities to reduce risks of crop failure (FAO Report, 2018). In addition, the use of mobile money transfer technology has eased transaction costs between farmers and markets for agricultural produce. In addition to other roles, it helps provide savings opportunities for farmers in rural areas excluded from traditional banking and financial sectors since economic planning is key to enhancing the socio-economic well-being of these communities.

In addition, using AI for mapping has increased accuracy by collecting data necessary for planning and formulating policy prioritisation. This can be evidenced by the social media platform Facebook, which recently, through their Connectivity Lab project, managed to deploy AI to accurately population density globally Naudé, Wim. (2020). Statistical data is important for economic planning by governments and humanitarian agencies that aid vulnerable communities in Africa, where data is sometimes less digitised and, hence, difficult to access.

## **Conclusion**

Examining the primary risks associated with AI and privacy reveals potential vulnerabilities and challenges. The African continent must address these issues to safeguard their states and individual privacy rights. Consequently, the region needs to develop data governance and transparent policies that are essential for mitigating these risks in AI deployment.

Africa needs to improve existing innovations while developing cutting-edge technologies that suit its economic, military and political security needs. The need for regulatory procedures governing research and production, and utilisation of AI. Regulatory procedures should be universal to be binding and compatible with the decision-making processes of the major stakeholders in the realm of AI.

The major stakeholders are still the states as the other actors are bound to operate within their territorial jurisdictions. In this regard, African states, through the African Union and Regional Economic blocs/Mechanisms, should strive to advocate for ethical policies governing AI, without necessarily signing protocols designed by external actors which in the end might be detrimental to Africa's political, economic, and security concerns. The focus on AI should cut across all three major sectors - economy, military, and politics. This will ultimately determine the positioning of African states within the wider international system and in the global technological security agenda.

## **Recommendation**

To strengthen Africa's position in the global technological security agenda, African nations must invest in the development and integration of AI. Governments should prioritise AI literacy, technical training, and infrastructure development to build local expertise and reduce dependency on foreign technologies. Additionally, establishing robust cybersecurity frameworks and ethical guidelines for AI applications will help mitigate the risks of misuse and exploitation, ensuring that AI is harnessed for peaceful and developmental purposes.

The African Union and other Regional Economic Blocs should play a pivotal role in coordinating policies, facilitating knowledge sharing, and advocating for equitable access to AI technologies. The states must ensure that AI-driven solutions address Africa's unique security challenges, from cybercrime to economic, military and political instability. By adopting a unified, strategic approach, Africa can navigate the complexities of AI and secure its future in the global technological landscape

Secondly, African nations should prioritise the development and utilisation of local datasets for training AI models. Regional collaboration on creating unbiased, contextually relevant algorithms can reduce dependency on foreign technologies and help mitigate issues such as racial and gender bias. Investing in African AI infrastructure and supporting local innovation hubs will empower the continent to produce AI solutions that reflect African realities and foster fairer socio-economic outcomes.

Thirdly, African countries should also advocate for the inclusion of African values, in global AI discussions and frameworks. This can be achieved through active participation in international AI policymaking and by promoting AI systems that prioritize community well-being over individualism. By integrating culturally relevant principles into AI design

and usage, African states can ensure that AI technologies align with local values, addressing societal needs and fostering inclusive development.

Finally, African nations should strengthen their involvement in global AI governance, particularly in international security AI frameworks. This can be achieved by actively participating in policy discussions, forming regional coalitions to amplify Africa's voice, and advocating for leadership roles in shaping global AI regulations. By fostering homegrown AI innovations and establishing partnerships with global stakeholders, Africa can transition from being a consumer to a leading contributor in the global AI landscape, ensuring that its perspectives are integral to international AI development.

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# CLIMATE RESPONSIVE SECURITY SECTOR REFORMS FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND SECURITY: THE AFRICAN UNION 2014 POLICY FRAMEWORK

**Michael Sitawa Mugah**

## **Abstract**

Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Africa remains guided by the Africa Union Policy Framework 2014, which was inspired by the need for the continent to have a structured approach to post-conflict reconstruction. This was premised upon the concerns that cases of relapse into conflict were mainly informed by fragilities in the security sector actors - mainly the military. The framework comprehensively interrogates the dynamics surrounding physical security pitfalls in the areas of oversight and security sector actors, signalling possibilities for strengthening accountability and legitimacy required for transformative security sector governance. A closer analysis of the document through a climate-focused lens points to the mention of looming climate change dynamics as opposed to conflict. This paper takes a desk review analysis, seeking to advance a case for climate change as a trigger of conflict. The paper proposes to have SSR Policy Framework updated to mainstream climate change, from an environmental security perspective - one of the seven elements of human security.

**Key terms:** *Security Sector Reform, Climate change, conflict, environment, restoration*

# Introduction

A central theme in Africa's development debate is the pursuit for sustainable peace and security as a precursor for development: social, political, and economic (Mlambo, 2015). In the 21st century, climate change has gained recognition as one of the leading global impediments to peace and security. Climate stressors and shocks can trigger and exacerbate frailties and unresolved grievances, thus aggravating tensions and conflict (United Nations, 2022). The Africa Union Commission was to develop a comprehensive AU Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform. It was to be contextualized within the 2006 Policy Framework adopted in Banjul, Gambia on Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development. In 2007, there was a new push in the security sector space on the African continent which came with the launch of the African Union Policy Framework and Reform Strategy. This was part of a resolution that came forth from an international workshop on SSR that was held in Cape Town, South Africa, between 7th and 8th November 2007.

A policy direction across national, regional and continental levels was adopted in support of the AU's efforts of the first-ever African Union SSR agenda to provide baseline guidelines. The document was a landmark around reforms as it was the first time the AU openly ventured into a mediator role at national security level by furnishing African states with the much-needed guidelines for security sector reform. To date, the document is the only continental SSR framework in existence. As authorities and mediators of security across the continent, it is imperative that through this framework, the AU takes cognizance of the existing as well as the emerging threats to security on the continent from a multi-lateral perspective and provides the necessary support to SSR processes. This support should be multi-pronged and capable of interrogating and tendering solutions to these threats. The main objective of this is to deliver peace and stability across the continent.

## Background

Since year 2000, the UN Secretary-General and the Security Council on several instances raised concerns about the existential threat as well as the ability of climate change and climate variability to impact on peace and security (United Nations Security Council, [UNSC], 2011). In 2015, the adoption of the Paris Agreement meant that the world had taken cognizance of the role and impact of climate change as a threat that had transcended the environmental and development discourse.

The debate on climate security at the UN Security Council has been ongoing since 2007

when the United Kingdom, tabled the matter as an agenda item for interrogation. The session had over 50 speakers who made presentations on the role of climate change and conflict (UNSC, 2007). The UN Security Council ventured into uncharted territory by providing a concrete response that elucidated the confluence between climate change, peace, security and stability. Consequently, to assist vulnerable governments in addressing the security implications of climate-related loss and damage, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) adopted the mentioning of security as one of its own security-based efforts.

The UN Security Council and the UNFCCC interrogate the issue from divergent viewpoints. The Security Council takes into consideration the security outcomes of climate change fundamentally in terms of the effect on conflicts that are ongoing and their resolution, while the UNFCCC takes a rather broader viewpoint that is premised upon the nexus between climate change, loss and damage, and the risk of violent conflict (UNFCCC, 2022).

### **The AU's Climate Security Framework**

The climate change and security nexus remain a sensitive and high-priority issue for the African Union. Since 2008, member states have been seized of the need to understand the confluence between these two issues and proffer solutions on how best to address them. In August 2024, the AU held a Member States Consultation workshop on the Development of the Common African Position on Climate Change, Peace and Security. This workshop brought together AU member states and other key actors on the continent to discuss the nexus between climate change and conflict (AU, 2024). This paper seeks to contribute to the debate by shedding light on and interrogating the intersecting factors of peace and security and climate change within the context of the needed impetus of Security Sector Reform. It also appreciates its implications for a sustainable continent and world. This resonates well with African solutions for African problems.

This paper aims to reorient the focus and discussion towards the policy reformulation of Security Sector Reforms (SSR). The aim is to enhance its definition with a view to incorporate the impact of climate change and variability. It proposes to state a case of climate-responsive SSR as one of the critical components of functional security institutions (military and police) as well as the secondary security service institutions within the public sector. This is to be achieved by offering new strands of thought into the long-established debate on the input of the security actors in climate change mitigation through investment in clean and renewable energy. In addition to this, delving into climate change adaptation and the implications on physical security will culminate in an invigorated mode of security.

In line with well-articulated policy concerns, the paper explores ways in which security organisations, especially the military, are charged with the responsibility of managing

both climate adaptation and mitigation. This requires reorienting their existing security model of delivery and input, and in turn, enforcement output.

Another area of focus revolves around the consideration of how the debate on matters of security sector reform needs to be given central focus. This is with particular emphasis on ensuring that the discussions embrace the ever-increasing need to focus on tweaking the provisions of training and education to speak to the emerging and existential threats related to climate change. This fundamentally involves significant updates to the training curriculum.

The Policy Framework on SSR provides a valuable point of reference for checks, balances and oversight that is public sector-driven for domestic security. As a result, the individuals and institutions charged with the responsibility of managing security are not detached or left out of essential domestic national processes of security, peace, and societal dialogue that increasingly benefit from the infusion aspects of climate mitigation and adaptation to increase the centrality to SSR (AU, 2023; UNOAU, 2023).

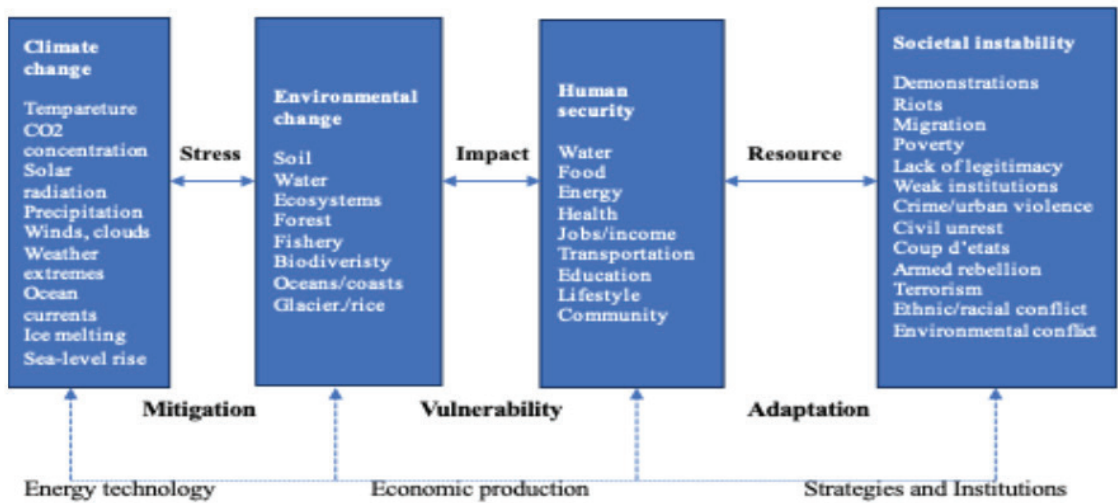
### **Integrated assessment framework of climate–society interaction**

The conflict and climate change nexus are elaborately elucidated in the integrated assessment framework of climate–society interaction by Schefran (2010). The framework touches on a series of events beginning with climate change, below which are indicators that mainly speak to increased Carbon Dioxide emissions, ozone layer depletion, radiation through harmful ultra-violet rays, rising sea levels, increased melting of ice on ice-capped mountains and the north and south poles mainly because of increased temperatures. With the stated phenomena in place, the planet undergoes stress, leading to certain environmental changes. These affect soils, water quality and levels. Ecosystems are offset leading to phenomena such as weather flipping, unreliable seasons and extreme rains.

Flora and fauna on land, in the air and in water are affected. Over time, the planet experiences the impact of these stresses on the ecosystems, leading to the broad spectrum of human security offset. Health, energy, employment opportunities, communities' lifestyles, education, modes of transport, energy and water sources are equally affected. Society, in response, will experience instability which will manifest in various forms such as coups, demonstrations, terrorism, ethnic and environmental-based conflicts, crime and urban violence, weakening of institutions (both state and non-state), increased joblessness, poverty and migration.

This is illustrated in the Figure 1:





**Figure 1:** Causal relationships between climate change, environmental impacts, human needs, and societal impacts (Scheffran, 2010).

A feedback loop gives societies a roadmap and strategy to put in place the appropriate adaptation mechanisms to change the situation by deploying mitigation strategies of climate stress. This is realized through the establishment of the appropriate strategies and institutions that embrace technology. It is coupled with social and human capital to make the necessary economies adjustments and energy production systems that are adaptive to the prevailing environmental as well as climatic conditions.

This paper interrogates the need to inform the AU Framework on SSR to incorporate climate action in its conflict response mechanisms. It is worth noting that, as per the framework, climate-triggered conflicts have sustainable solutions through addressing climate change.

### Methodology

This paper is anchored on the advocacy philosophical worldview (Creswell, 2008). The philosophy advocates for an action agenda for reform. The aim is to change the manner in which the AU framework and its member states approach SSR. It advocates for a sustainable climate-responsive SSR both from proactive and reactive stances.

The paper is based on a desktop research design involving multiple authoritative sources to gain a good grasp of a specific phenomenon (Sitawa et al., 2020). It involved the review of the AU SSR Policy of 2014. The research design also leans on the citation of existing case studies to strengthen the case of the relationship between the independent and

dependent variables i.e. climate change and violent conflict. Additionally, it gives a model of a climate-responsive SSR and the benefits it provides to environmental sustainability.

## **Case Studies**

In Nigeria, the nexus between resource extraction, climate change and conflict has played out in Zamfara, whereby an ecologically fragile ecosystem has suffered extreme pollution due to gold mining. Bartram et al. (2022) observe that the pollution due to the processing of ores in residential areas has led to the loss of lives (especially of children) due to contaminated water sources. It has contributed to the rise in conflict due to competition between agrarian and pastoralist communities living in the semi-arid region that also suffers poverty as well as political instability. These dynamics have led to the location being referred to as “ground zero” for climate-related conflict.

Sax et al. (2023) make a case for how climate change triggers conflict in Ethiopia. They draw a nexus between livelihood and food insecurity whereby they observed that the greater land mass of Ethiopia’s land is susceptible to extreme climatic conditions which in turn influence production and availability of food. It has been noted that there are localised hotspots of food insecurity in the Tigray, Somali and Afar regions that point to increased incidences of clashes and violent conflict. This further makes them vulnerable to climate-related security threats.

According to Tarif (2024), the Federal Republic of Somalia is one of the nations in Africa that is most susceptible to the effects of climate change and climate variability. This is partly attributed to the persistent effects of the protracted violent conflict that has lasted three years. The nation experienced its worst ever recorded drought between mid-2021 to early 2023. It was at the peak of this drought in August 2022, that the Somali National Army (SNA), supported by various clan militias launched operations against the Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen commonly known as al-Shabab terror organization. This operation took place in south-central Somalia that is known to be mainly ungoverned, with the limited state presence lacking the capacity to cushion the population from the vagaries of drought. As a result of this, in 2022, an approximated 1.3 million people were internally displaced as the raging violent conflict displaced another 600,000 plus.

Rowlatt (2024) is of the position that Somalia is a victim of a climate crisis that it had no hand in, as it is considered an insignificant contributor to global carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. On the contrary, the effects of climate change specifically the drought, have led to among others, acute malnutrition that has affected approximately 1.5 million children below the age of 5. Pushed by desperation, men and boys are easily susceptible to recruitment into terror organisations as they seek to fend for their families. Equally, the harsh climate has driven community members into fierce competition for scarce resources, i.e. water and pasture, which often see manifested rivalries that degenerate into conflict. The nature of violence sometimes involves the use of firearms, where communities rise against one another in a bid to secure their survival.

In Kenya the conflict and climate change nexus are intertwined in various parts that are either affected by insecurity or are reeling from the effects of climate change. According to a study conducted in Turkana County by Ember et al. (2012), it was observed that violent conflict intensified when the region experienced/received less than normal rainfall. The rationale behind this is the high desperation among communities and groups seeking to survive the difficult conditions and where there is a lack of a pre-arranged and amicable way to access resources.

Sitawa et al. (2020), in a study conducted in Lamu County, Kenya, observed that there was an increase in the number of conflicts in the County during the dry seasons as herder communities, especially of neighbouring counties such as Garissa and Tana River, in search of pasture, drove their animals into Lamu. As they grazed the forests and open fields during the day, they took advantage of the cover of darkness to drive their animals into locals' farms, resulting in the destruction of crops. In retaliation, farmers would target herders' animals, leading to counterattacks by the herders, which sometimes saw members of the community, including children, fall victim to violent conflict. The protracted drought also led to human-wildlife conflict where animals invaded water points and farms in search of pasture and water, respectively.

### **Challenges in Realizing a Climate Change Integration on SSR Policy**

A few probable persistent bottlenecks may affect the realisation, domestication and implementation of a climate-sensitive African Union policy framework on SSR at the national level. There is a high likelihood, therefore, that it may equally affect the implementation of climate change responses. The following are some of the most probable challenges that the paper identifies and discusses.

The first is a lack of political will, which is essential for nations to push for climate change mitigation. This is bound to impact the economy of war in the long run, which may not go down well with some profiteers of conflict. In many contexts, security sector reform faces complexities due to the levels of attention it attracts from local, regional, and international actors, mainly among political (Lindvall (2021) and military elites (Seko, 2024). Hence, the mechanisms and parameters required to deliver the transformation of security sector reform point to the possibility of intense resistance from some elites in a bid to maintain the status quo. This is commonplace when their interests are believed to be directly or indirectly threatened.

Poor governance is the second notable concern as there are cases of weaknesses in leadership that is unappreciative of the nexus between climate change and conflict. They, therefore, may lack the impetus to rationalise climate-responsive policies in addressing conflict. The third is a weak or non-existent legislative framework. This means that interrogation and prosecution of conflicts and disputes related to climate change may not benefit from the levels of analysis required to appreciate the nexus between climate

change and conflict and further tender rulings that are neither cautious nor responsive to this ever-growing threat.

Some nations may fall back on affirmative action to promote inclusion in the fourth possible impediment. The non-inclusive aspect in decision-making processes leaves out critical views from women, youth, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and minority communities. These are bound to make an impact in raising awareness of climate-driven conflicts and contribute to climate change mitigation drives.

The fifth possible challenge would be a lack of clear strategy cascaded and domesticated from continental to national and further to the grassroots level. This will mean that efforts towards climate change within the SSR Framework cannot be structured and executed.

The sixth aspect looks at the lack of funding and resources. In view of the competing needs that regimes face in the delivery of mandates that are heavily informed by terms in office, climate action often gets relegated to footnote status through minimal or no funding allocation.

The seventh aspect is the broader inability to integrate different actors and their climate mitigation responses, both vertically and horizontally, across different ministries and departments and collaborations with non-state actors.

The eighth are Resource gaps and shortfalls. mean The African Union lacks the capacity to provide the necessary capacity building as well as offer support to member states on security sector reform. The challenge of underfunding of the AU is as a result of lack of political will of member states to donate funds for the operations of the AU. Governmental contributions to the AU fall far short of what should be remitted to support AU operations and projects. The reliance of the AU on international cooperating partners for funding to implement projects and fund operations is another challenge as donors may be selective on the projects they fund. This aid sometimes comes with terms and conditions that may not be pro-African in nature. There has been the burden of providing a return on investment in transformation in Africa against other countries in the western hemisphere. This, in the long run, tends to affect the flow of funding that comes directly to the AU.

Given these challenges, there should be a sustained push to ensure that elements of climate cautious and responsive SSR are integrated closely with other policy frameworks. Several lessons can be drawn from existing best practices to help create these links and ensure the implementation of climate change-related SSR principles on the ground.

## **Conclusion**

Climate change and variability present certain vagaries that give significance to conflict as a means of survival. In as much as investment in disarmament, demobilisation and

reintegration(DDR) initiatives to curb violence is ongoing and is applaudable, it can only go so far in achieving sustainable peace. At the moment, while the success of peacebuilding strategies is only assured by temperature rises of less than 2 degrees, peacebuilders do not include climate change as part of peacebuilding interventions, notwithstanding that increased global temperatures are a reality. It is, therefore, imperative that investment in SSR be holistic in nature; incorporating climate action as part of the reforms that the security sector should undergo is a major step toward sustainable peace.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are some of the proposals in which the AU and its Member States may enhance climate-sensitive SSR and post-conflict reconstruction and development activities. It is important to have the continent invest in the management of these resources throughout the peace continuum. The AU can therefore work hand in hand with its member states to promote environmental sustainability principles in mining operations, carbon neutrality, and sharing of resources for restoration and sustainable use. These can best be achieved through providing corporate social responsibility guidelines that can be adopted by member states and communities.

Furthermore, the African Union could partner with regional economic communities and regional mechanisms, through the guidance of regional climate initiatives to address challenges directly linked to land competition and damages suffered by the natural environment during conflict times. The presence and goodwill of these initiatives could support the establishment and rollout of a robust climate-responsive SSR.

The AU could also lend more support to regional natural resource management (flora and fauna), human security initiatives, and eco-friendly development plans as well as green growth corridors. The AU Member States can adopt actions linked to the restoration of the natural environment as part of bailout initiatives for post-conflict reconstruction and development of the country.

In addition, African countries should include in their training offered to security forces/ services (in cadet school), elements of climate change as well as environmental conservation and rehabilitation strategies. This is critical in their integration and contribution to climate-responsive policy engagement and action.

It is also recommended that all peace missions in Africa at the post-conflict reconstruction phase should benefit from an injection of funding that is specific to environmental restoration and conservation. Moreover, future peace operations on the African continent should also be informed by a revamped continental SSR policy in that they should have a component on climate action and environmental conservation at the stage of drafting their concepts of operations. They should also be part and parcel of the evaluation criteria of mission success which assesses aspects of climate change.

African states should upscale investment in climate change research that should be shared across regions and the continent under the supervision of the AU. These will inform climate-security-related indicators in existing internal mechanisms for conflict early warning, early response, and prevention should be embraced.

It should be part and parcel of the revamped AU SSR policy that quarterly briefs on climate-related tensions and conflicts generated at the AU level should be transmitted to the UNSC for further action. These can also serve to support resource mobilisation towards climate mitigation and environmental conservation efforts.

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# ARMS PROLIFERATION AND MILITANCY IN AFRICA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BOKO HARAM AND AL-SHABAAB IN WEST AND EAST AFRICA

Luchetu Likaka

## Abstract

This paper explores the significant role of the proliferation of arms in fueling militancy across Africa, with a particular focus on militant groups such as *Boko Haram* in Nigeria and *Al-Shabaab* in Somalia. Utilising the Conflict Theory, which posits that social order is maintained by domination and power rather than consensus and conformity, this study argues that the availability of illicit arms exacerbates power imbalances, leading to increased conflict and instability. The study highlights the critical challenges posed by weak border controls, pervasive corruption, and the accessibility of sophisticated weaponry, which collectively enhance the operational capabilities and lethality of these militant groups. Through a comparative analysis, the paper examines the variations in how arms proliferation impacts different regions and the effectiveness of various countermeasures. Major findings indicate that innovative strategies, such as strengthening regional cooperation and intelligence-sharing, are essential for disrupting illegal arms flows. The implementation of advanced surveillance technologies and the enforcement of stricter border controls are identified as key measures to curb arms trafficking. Additionally, disarmament and reintegration programs for former combatants emerge as crucial components in reducing the supply of weapons and preventing their reuse by militant groups. The paper advocates for an integrated approach involving collaboration among governments, international organisations, and civil society to establish a sustainable framework for peace and security. There is a need to address the root causes of arms proliferation and enhance the capabilities of security forces; the study concludes that practical solutions can mitigate the impact of arms proliferation on militancy and contribute to long-term stability across the African continent. The study highlights the urgent need for coordinated regional and international efforts to curb arms proliferation and weaken militant groups like *Boko Haram* and *Al-Shabaab*. By enhancing border security, disrupting trafficking networks, and addressing the socio-economic vulnerabilities exploited by these groups, Africa can move toward sustainable peace and security.

**Keywords:** arms proliferation, militancy, illicit arms trade, regional security, disarmament.

# Introduction

Arms proliferation in Africa is deeply rooted in the continent's colonial history, where European powers utilised arms to suppress resistance and maintain control over vast territories. During the colonial era, the distribution of weapons to local allies and collaborators created a long-lasting culture of arms dependence, laying the groundwork for the challenges of modern arms proliferation (Mburu, 2003). Post-independence, the influx of arms continued as newly established African states struggled with ethnic divisions, power struggles, and civil wars, leading to internal conflicts and the widespread circulation of weapons. For instance, during the 1960s and 1970s, arms were supplied by former colonial powers to maintain influence, and local factions often engaged in violent power struggles, exacerbating the demand for arms (Alusala, 2007).

The cold war era further accelerated arms proliferation in Africa, as major powers, including the United States and the Soviet Union, provided military support to governments and rebel groups aligned with their ideological interests. These weapons, often funneling into volatile regions, resulted in an unprecedented spread of small arms and light weapons (SALW) across the continent. According to Schmidt (2013), the massive arms flow during the Cold War significantly increased the number of weapons in circulation, many of which remain in conflict zones long after the initial conflicts have subsided. As a result, contemporary Africa faces the challenge of controlling arms left over from past conflicts, which continue to fuel insurgencies and destabilize countries.

In the post-Cold War era, globalisation and technological advancements have played a crucial role in facilitating the illicit arms trade, making it easier for weapons to flow across porous borders and into the hands of militant groups. The development of faster transportation methods, such as air and sea freight, combined with the rise of digital communication networks, has enabled traffickers to organise complex arms smuggling routes more efficiently (Florquin & Berman, 2005). Advances in digital technology have also allowed arms traffickers to circumvent traditional law enforcement by using encrypted communication, online platforms, and cryptocurrencies to facilitate transactions, thus complicating efforts to track and intercept illicit arms shipments.

In many African countries, porous borders, inadequate law enforcement, and political instability have created an environment where arms can be easily trafficked, making it nearly impossible to control their flow (Boutwell & Klare, 1998). Weak governance structures and corruption at various levels of government have further exacerbated the

issue of arms proliferation. For instance, in the Lake Chad Basin, where Boko Haram operates, the group's ability to acquire arms is largely due to the porous borders between Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, combined with limited resources to monitor and control these regions effectively.

The aftermath of post-conflict situations presents a unique challenge, as arms that once belonged to state forces or rebel groups are often repurposed and re-circulated. In countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone, weapons from former conflicts have re-entered the civilian population, fueling new rounds of violence and insurgency. According to the Small Arms Survey (2023), the uncontrolled circulation of these arms is one of the main obstacles to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in post-conflict environments. Without effective Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs, the risk of rearmament remains high, preventing lasting peace and stability.

The history of arms proliferation in Africa is shaped by colonialism, Cold War geopolitics, and more recent developments in global arms trafficking facilitated by technology. To mitigate the effects of arms proliferation, African nations must strengthen governance, enhance regional cooperation, and develop robust disarmament initiatives, particularly in post-conflict settings where illicit weapons continue to circulate.

Arms proliferation is an escalating crisis across Africa, igniting conflicts, destabilising regions, and empowering militant groups such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, whose access to illicit weapons fuels both regional violence and transnational threats. The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons has not only amplified the operational reach of these groups but also weakened state institutions, impeding the government's ability to maintain control and security. While Africa's colonial past, marked by arbitrary borders and ethnic divides, set the stage for these enduring conflicts (Mburu, 2003), contemporary drivers such as fragile governance and porous borders continue exacerbating the issue. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the proliferation of arms grew as both state and non-state actors in Africa accessed leftover arsenals from global powers, deepening the region's security challenges (Schmidt, 2013; Marsh, 2021).

In recent years, the destabilisation of Libya has intensified arms trafficking networks across the Sahel and Horn of Africa, equipping groups like Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab with the firepower to sustain insurgencies and spread fear (Zenn, 2020; Hansen, 2022). Boko Haram exploits arms channels through Niger and Chad, largely sourced from Libya. At the same time, Al-Shabaab relies on maritime routes via Yemen, facilitated by limited governance in Somalia and neighbouring regions (Ewi, 2023). These flows of arms not only empower militant operations but also complicate peace efforts, as arms trafficking networks expand alongside militancy, fueling a cycle of violence that regional and international actors struggle to contain.

Groups like Boko Haram, for instance, capitalize on Libya's post-Gaddafi instability and

the subsequent release of stockpiles of sophisticated weaponry, which are trafficked through weakly controlled corridors such as the Sahel (Zenn, 2020; Ewi, 2023). The role of transnational actors and global arms networks highlights how modern arms proliferation is no longer constrained by local boundaries. Similarly, Al-Shabaab's access to arms trafficked through maritime routes from Yemen, often facilitated by weak governance structures in Somalia, has allowed it to maintain a sustained insurgency and destabilize the Horn of Africa (Hansen, 2022).

These dynamics illustrate the need for coordinated regional and international efforts to curb arms proliferation and address the structural weaknesses that enable trafficking networks. Effective strategies could include strengthening border control, improving security sector governance, and enhancing collaborative arms control initiatives, such as the African Union's Silencing the Guns Initiative, aimed at reducing the flow of illicit arms in conflict-prone regions (African Union Peace and Security Department, 2023).

Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab are among the most organized and destructive insurgent groups in West and East Africa, exerting a devastating influence on regional stability. Both groups not only destabilize their countries of origin but also engage in cross-border violence that threatens the security of neighboring nations. In West Africa, Boko Haram's insurgency in Nigeria has spilled over into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, drawing these countries into an enduring conflict that has led to widespread displacement, civilian casualties, and economic disruption (Ewi, 2023). The group's attacks across borders stretch regional resources and necessitate military cooperation among affected countries, straining each nation's security forces and creating economic burdens that hinder development.

Similarly, Al-Shabaab's operations in East Africa demonstrate its capacity for cross-border destabilization. Though primarily based in Somalia, Al-Shabaab frequently targets Kenya, carrying out attacks against civilians, government officials, and military personnel. Notable incidents, such as the Garissa University attack in 2015 and regular bombings in Nairobi, highlight the group's ability to strike at the heart of neighboring nations, severely impacting Kenya's tourism sector, creating economic instability, and eroding public trust in national security (Hansen, 2022; Mahmoud, 2023). These transnational operations not only illustrate each group's reach but also underline the challenges they pose for regional stability, as affected nations are forced to divert significant resources toward security rather than development.

Both insurgencies sustain themselves through complex and extensive arms trafficking networks, exploiting weak governance, porous borders, and access to global arms markets. In West Africa, Boko Haram capitalizes on smuggling networks around the Lake Chad Basin, where porous borders facilitate the easy movement of illicit weapons sourced from destabilized regions, such as post-Gaddafi Libya. These weapons include small arms, light weapons, and even more sophisticated military-grade equipment, enabling

Boko Haram to maintain a prolonged insurgency and execute highly lethal attacks (Zenn, 2020; Ewi, 2023).

Al-Shabaab, on the other hand, relies on maritime smuggling routes along the Somali coast, where it has developed strong connections with arms suppliers in Yemen. The group's ability to navigate and control these channels has allowed it to access a steady stream of weapons, which it uses to launch attacks within Somalia and across the Kenyan border. These arms trafficking networks are fundamental to the groups' survival, making them critical case studies for understanding how illicit arms trade fuels insurgency across Africa. The sustained flow of weapons has allowed both groups to expand their influence and destabilise entire regions, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated regional and international interventions to curb arms trafficking and strengthen border security (Florquin & Berman, 2021; AU, 2023).

Previous research, such as Onuoha et al. (2021), has focused primarily on Nigeria and the role of small arms in fueling conflicts there. However, this paper broadens the scope by offering a comparative analysis of two insurgencies in distinct geographical regions—West and East Africa. By examining how similar challenges, like arms trafficking and governance failures, manifest differently in these regions, this analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between insurgency and arms proliferation across the continent.

## **Theoretical Underpinning**

To address the research questions on the effects of arms proliferation, the sources and channels of illicit arms, and the role of regional and international actors in mitigating its impact, several theoretical perspectives can be applied. These perspectives provide a framework for understanding the dynamics of arms proliferation and its connection to militancy in Africa, specifically in the cases of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. Below, I explore key theories relevant to the research questions and justify their application to this study while also addressing their strengths and weaknesses.

## **The Theory of Human Security**

This theory emphasises the importance of securing basic needs (e.g., safety, livelihood, and political participation) to reduce the vulnerabilities that groups like Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab exploit (Buzan et al., 1998). This theory can be used to understand how arms proliferation exacerbates the insecurity of local populations and strengthens militant groups. The availability of illicit arms allows groups to challenge state security forces, destabilize governance structures, and perpetuate violence against civilians. In both Boko Haram's insurgency in Nigeria and Al-Shabaab's activities in Somalia and the Horn of Africa, arms proliferation has directly fueled human insecurity, leading to mass displacement and humanitarian crises (Florquin & Berman, 2005). A limitation of the human security theory is its broad scope, which may obscure specific geopolitical and

regional dynamics. It also tends to focus on the individual or community level rather than state-level security, which may understate the importance of military and governmental efforts in combating arms proliferation.

### **The Political Economy of Conflict**

The political economy of conflict examines how economic factors, including the distribution of resources and access to arms, drive violent conflicts. This theory posits that conflicts, especially those driven by non-state actors, are often fueled by economic interests, such as control over arms supplies, illicit trade routes, and natural resources (Collier, 2007). The political economy of conflict theory is particularly relevant for studying how Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab exploit illicit arms markets. Both groups use arms to maintain control over territories, engage in illicit trade, and finance their operations through activities such as kidnapping for ransom and smuggling (Hansen, 2013). The theory helps explain how arms proliferation sustains their operational capabilities by enabling them to access resources that would otherwise be unavailable.

While the political economy of conflict provides valuable insights into the economic motivations of insurgencies, it may overemphasize economic factors while underappreciating the ideological, religious, and identity-based motivations that also drive groups like Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a pragmatic research philosophy, considered particularly suitable for addressing complex real-world problems, such as the relationship between arms proliferation and militancy. Pragmatism emphasizes the practical consequences of research and is often applied in studies aimed at informing policy and practice. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches, this philosophy enabled the researcher to explore the operational dynamics of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab while also examining the effectiveness of regional and international interventions in combating arms proliferation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach aligned with the study's goal of providing actionable insights to combat militancy in Africa.

The study employed a comparative case study design to explore the dynamics of arms proliferation in two distinct yet interconnected regions: West Africa, focusing on Boko Haram, and East Africa, focusing on Al-Shabaab. The comparative approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of how arms trafficking affected the operational capabilities of these groups, the sources and channels of illicit arms, and the strategies used to mitigate the impacts of arms proliferation. Case studies were deemed ideal for examining the complex interactions and contextual variables surrounding militant insurgencies and the flow of illicit arms (Yin, 2018).

The study focused on the regions affected by Boko Haram in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and



Cameroon (the Lake Chad Basin region), as well as the regions impacted by Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia. These areas have been central to major insurgencies, with both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab operating across borders, making them critical for understanding the transnational nature of arms proliferation. The selection of these sites was also based on the availability of data on both groups and the relevant regional efforts to combat militancy and arms trafficking (GTI, 2022).

The target population included government officials, security personnel, border control agents, regional peacekeeping forces, local community leaders, and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who are directly involved in managing security, arms control, and counter-insurgency efforts in the affected regions. This group provides key insights into the operational capabilities of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, the sources and methods of arms trafficking, and the effectiveness of current policies to counter these threats. Additionally, the study involved victims of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab attacks, who provided firsthand accounts of the impact of arms proliferation on local communities.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants with expertise and direct involvement in arms control, counter-insurgency, and regional security. This approach allowed for the collection of comprehensive insights from those actively engaged with the issues. Participants were divided into two primary groups: government and security personnel and community leaders, victims and NGO workers. The total sample size ranged from 50 to 80 participants across the six countries. This range was selected to ensure that the data collected achieved saturation while remaining feasible to manage within the study's scope.

To answer the research questions, the study utilized mixed methods, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with government officials, military officers, border agents, and NGO workers to gather qualitative insights into the sources of illicit arms, the operational capabilities of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, and the strategies currently employed to address these issues. These interviews provided a deeper understanding of the on-the-ground realities and the responses to arms proliferation. A structured survey was administered to community leaders and affected civilians to assess their experiences with militancy and arms proliferation. The survey included questions regarding the presence of arms in local areas, their impact on security, and the effectiveness of existing responses to mitigate the risks posed by these weapons.

Additionally, the study incorporated document analysis, examining secondary data from reports by organizations such as the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), and other regional bodies. Academic publications and policy papers were also reviewed to track arms trafficking routes and evaluate international efforts to combat militancy in the regions affected by Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. Finally, focus group discussions were

organised with local community leaders to explore the social and economic impacts of arms proliferation. These discussions aimed to capture the perceptions of these leaders regarding the effectiveness of regional security cooperation and their views on the broader implications of arms trade and militancy in their communities.

To ensure reliability, the study employed consistent data collection procedures across all sites, ensuring uniform application of methods in each case. All interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim, which facilitated accurate data capture and minimized potential biases. For validity, the study utilized triangulation by comparing data from multiple sources, including interviews, surveys, document analysis, and focus group discussions. This approach corroborated the findings and strengthened the overall results. Additionally, expert validation was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with key stakeholders in the security and policy sectors, which allowed for the verification of interpretations and enhanced the credibility of the study's conclusions.

The data analysis for the study employed both qualitative and quantitative techniques. For qualitative analysis, thematic analysis was utilized to identify recurring themes and patterns within the interviews, focus group discussions, and documents. NVivo software was used to facilitate coding and organizing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In terms of quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics were applied to survey data, using frequencies and percentages to summarize patterns concerning the prevalence and sources of arms proliferation, as well as the perceived effectiveness of intervention strategies. Finally, a comparative analysis was conducted to examine the two case studies—Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab—focusing on the similarities and differences in their operational strategies and the effectiveness of regional and international policies.

To ensure ethical integrity, several measures were implemented. First, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to confidentiality. Written consent was obtained from all participants before conducting interviews or surveys. Additionally, all data was anonymized to protect the identity of participants, especially those from vulnerable populations, and will be securely stored, accessible only to the research team. To mitigate any potential harm, particular care was taken to ensure that participation does not expose individuals to risks or retraumatize them, especially given the sensitive nature of the study, which involves victims of militancy. In cases where needed, the research team provided referrals to counseling services. Furthermore, researcher underwent training in cultural competency to ensure that all interactions with participants are respectful of local norms and values, particularly when working in conflict-affected regions.

## **Findings**

This section discusses the findings from the study that address how arms proliferation enhances the operational capabilities of both groups, with a focus on the Lake Chad

Basin region (Boko Haram) and the Horn of Africa (Al-Shabaab). By exploring the sources, routes, and impacts of illicit arms, the study highlights the challenges posed by these groups and the complex interplay between regional instability and the availability of weaponry.

### **Impact of Arms Proliferation on Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab**

Arms proliferation has had a substantial impact on both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. Both groups rely heavily on illicit weapons to bolster their operational capabilities, carry out sustained military operations, and challenge state authority.

The rise of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria and its subsequent expansion into neighboring countries, such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, can be partly attributed to the large influx of small arms and light weapons (SALW) into the region. The group has benefited from the availability of sophisticated weaponry, particularly following the collapse of the Libyan state in 2011. The weapons that flooded from Libyan stockpiles through smuggling networks into the Sahel region have significantly enhanced Boko Haram's ability to stage coordinated attacks, increase its lethality, and sustain a decade-long insurgency. The Global Terrorism Index (GTI, 2022) notes that Boko Haram has been responsible for over 37,000 deaths and 2.5 million displacements, demonstrating the direct link between arms proliferation and the group's sustained operations.

The availability of advanced weaponry also allows Boko Haram to engage in high-profile attacks against civilian and military targets, hijack vehicles, and carry out mass abductions, such as the infamous 2014 Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping. In 2020 alone, the group was responsible for 244 attacks and 2,143 deaths, underlining the role of arms in facilitating its operations (GTI, 2022).

Al-Shabaab's ability to conduct large-scale operations and transnational attacks is similarly linked to its access to illicit arms. Operating in Somalia, the Horn of Africa, and across the borders of Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia, Al-Shabaab has access to a wide array of arms that fuel its insurgency. Al-Shabaab primarily sources its weapons from maritime trafficking routes between Somalia and Yemen, which have been crucial to arming the group. Additionally, arms are often smuggled through porous borders between Somalia and Kenya, further complicating efforts to control arms flow into the region. Al-Shabaab's use of explosives, small arms, and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs) has become a defining characteristic of its military tactics.

High-profile attacks such as the 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi and the 2017 Mogadishu bombing, which resulted in over 500 casualties, highlight the deadly consequences of the group's access to illicit arms. According to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC, 2021), Al-Shabaab's operations in Somalia alone resulted in over 1,200 civilian deaths in 2020, demonstrating how the proliferation of arms has empowered the group to inflict widespread violence.

## Sources and Channels of Illicit Arms

The findings from the study reveal the sources and channels that fuel the proliferation of arms into both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab's operational zones. The sources include both local and international networks, and the channels involve complex smuggling routes that exploit weak border controls and governance gaps. The major sources of arms for Boko Haram include Libyan stockpiles and trafficking. Following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime, weapons that were once stockpiled in Libya became widely available, flooding the Sahel region, including Nigeria. These weapons, including assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and anti-aircraft guns, have equipped Boko Haram with the means to sustain its insurgency. Arms are trafficked across porous borders, especially in the Lake Chad Basin, through Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. These countries, which share borders with northeastern Nigeria, are often ill-equipped to control illegal arms trafficking.

Al-Shabaab's main sources of arms are maritime trafficking routes from Yemen and cross border; as a major supplier of illicit arms, Yemen plays a pivotal role in providing small arms, explosives, and ammunition to Al-Shabaab. The Horn of Africa's vast maritime coastline makes it difficult for authorities to prevent the smuggling of arms. On other hand, Al-Shabaab also acquires weapons from neighboring countries, particularly Kenya and Ethiopia, where porous borders and lax enforcement allow arms to flow into Somalia. These weapons often include assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and various improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather insights into the scale of arms proliferation and its effects on militancy. Key findings from the survey of government officials, community leaders, and security personnel are summarized below:

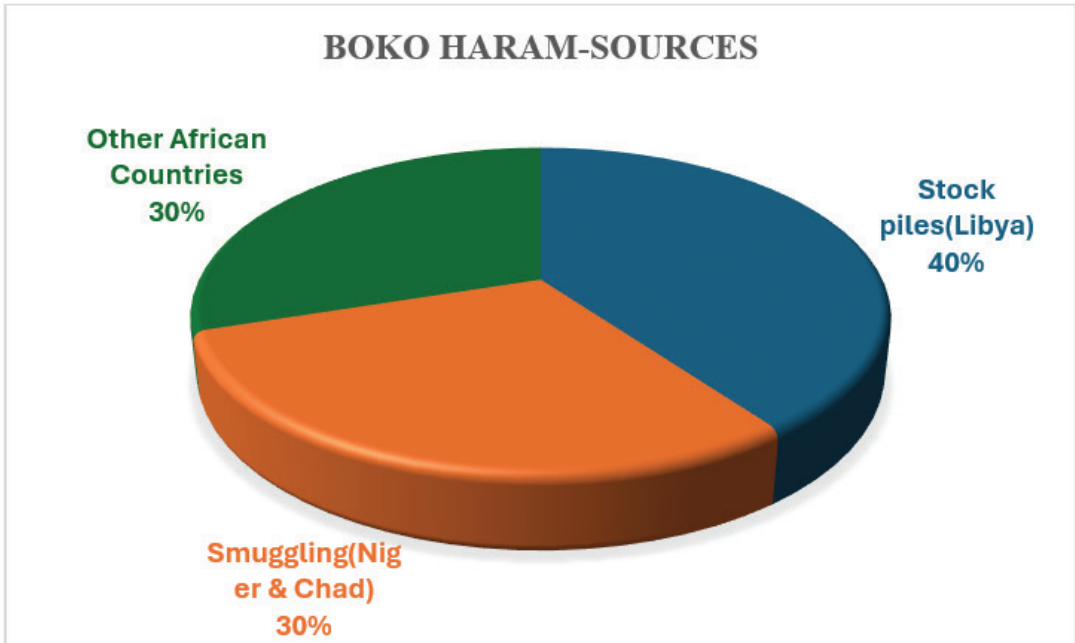
**Table 4.1:** Prevalence of Illicit Arms in Affected Regions

Country	Presence of Illicit Arms (%)	Community Impact (%)
Nigeria	85%	75%
Niger	80%	70%
Chad	70%	65%
Cameroon	65%	60%
Somalia	90%	85%
Kenya	80%	72%
Ethiopia	60%	58%

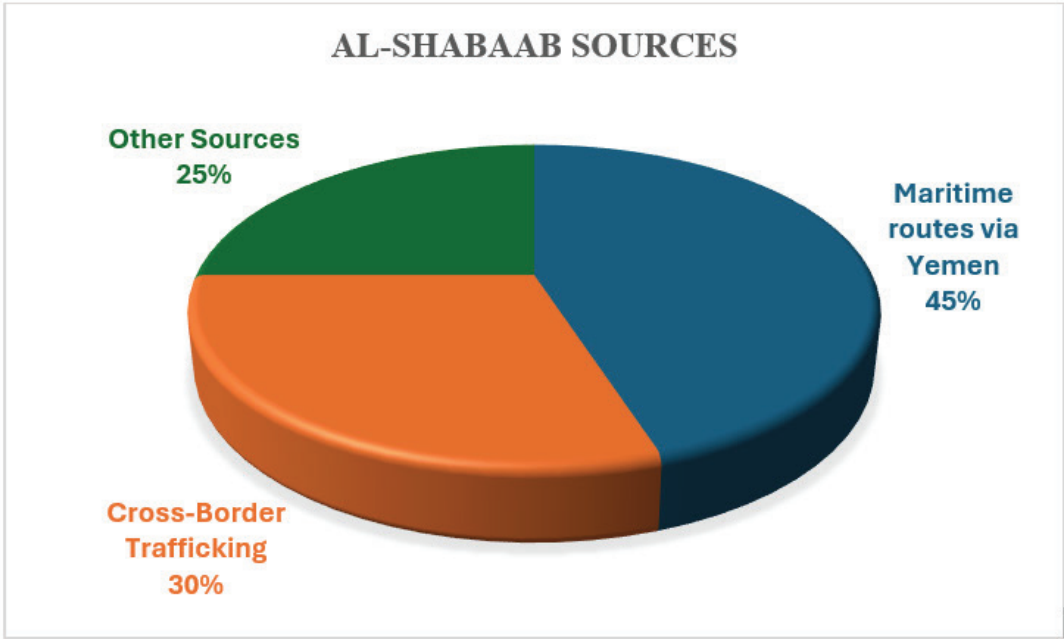
The Table 4.1 above reflects the significant presence of illicit arms across the affected regions, with Nigeria and Somalia experiencing the highest prevalence. The community impact column highlights how the proliferation of arms directly affects local populations, with Somalia and Nigeria experiencing the most severe consequences.

### Sources of Illicit Arms for Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab

Figure 4.1 and 4.2 below demonstrates that while both groups rely on multiple sources for their arms, Boko Haram is more dependent on land-based smuggling, whereas Al-Shabaab's primary source of arms is maritime trafficking.



**Figure 4.1: Sources of Illicit Arms for Boko Haram**



**Figure 4.2: Sources of Illicit Arms for Al-Shabaab**

**Effectiveness of Regional and International Interventions**

*Table 4.2: Effectiveness of Interventions*

Intervention Type	Boko Haram Region	Al-Shabaab Region
Border Security Enhancements	60%	55%
International Arms Control	50%	60%
Regional Security Cooperation	45%	50%

Table 4.2 provides an overview of how respondents perceive the effectiveness of various regional and international interventions. It shows that while there is a moderate level of satisfaction with international efforts aimed at controlling the flow of arms, respondents feel that regional cooperation and border security are considerably less effective. This dissatisfaction is particularly noticeable in areas like the Lake Chad Basin, where issues such as porous borders and limited inter-country collaboration exacerbate security

challenges. The data suggests that respondents believe regional measures need to be strengthened to better address these local and cross-border security concerns.

## Discussions

The findings of this study reveal intricate dynamics surrounding the role of illicit arms proliferation in enabling militancy, particularly in relation to the operational capacities of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. In the Kenyan context, informants consistently highlighted the connection between regional arms trafficking routes and Al-Shabaab's cross-border activities, pointing out that weak border enforcement and vast, porous borders create significant security challenges. The Somali-Kenyan border serves as a gateway through which illicit arms enter Kenya, often finding their way into local markets and enabling Al-Shabaab to conduct attacks within Kenyan territory (Sikuku, 2021; Kenya Border Security Report, 2022).

The findings suggest that Al-Shabaab's access to illicit arms has not only intensified its operations but has also allowed it to exploit technological advancements, particularly in weaponry, for more sophisticated attacks. Interviews with security officers in Kenya's border regions indicate that arms are smuggled through well-organized networks, with connections to suppliers in Yemen and beyond (Onyango, 2023). The informants further mentioned that these arms include small arms and light weapons (SALWs), which are easy to transport and conceal yet have a significant impact on regional security. Florquin & Berman (2020) argue that the widespread availability of SALWs in East Africa is a persistent problem, corroborated by Kenyan security reports that highlight how these weapons are preferred by non-state actors due to their mobility and affordability.

Key informants identified Yemen as a primary source of arms for Al-Shabaab, aligning with findings from the UN Panel of Experts on Somalia (2022), which reports that arms frequently reach Al-Shabaab via maritime routes along Somalia's unregulated coast. In Kenya, NGO workers and local leaders in Garissa and Mandera reported that arms often move from Somalia into northeastern Kenya through informal trade networks, compounded by limited state presence in these remote areas (Abdullahi, 2023). This flow is exacerbated by regional smuggling routes that traverse insecure territories in Ethiopia and southern Somalia, ultimately making it challenging to halt the movement of arms even with international monitoring efforts.

In assessing the responses of regional and international actors, Kenyan informants were generally critical, noting that while there have been substantial efforts, these measures have often been inadequate due to issues of corruption, limited resources, and lack of local coordination. Kenya's involvement in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was cited as a critical regional effort that, while significant, has been constrained by resource limitations and occasional political tensions within the East African Community (EAC). AMISOM and subsequent missions have made strides in containing Al-Shabaab, yet the group's adaptability and access to arms continue to pose challenges (Gure, 2022).



Informants recommended strengthening interagency cooperation and investing in border security technologies to disrupt these arms flows. Chesterfield (2023) highlights that multi-stakeholder approaches involving both state and non-state actors are essential in mitigating the impact of arms proliferation, a viewpoint reinforced by Kenyan security experts who believe that sustained partnerships with community leaders and local governments could improve surveillance and intelligence-gathering efforts in remote areas.

Given these findings, the study emphasizes the need for a tailored, multifaceted strategy that addresses the unique regional factors influencing arms proliferation and militancy. Informants and recent literature advocate for cross-border intelligence-sharing frameworks, enhanced maritime security efforts, and localized initiatives that engage community stakeholders in surveillance and reporting mechanisms (Achuka, 2023; Kenya Security and Peace Report, 2022). These approaches, combined with increased political commitment from regional bodies like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), are deemed essential for weakening Al-Shabaab's operational capacity and reducing the flow of illicit arms across East Africa.

This detailed examination of the Kenyan case highlights that the complexity of arms proliferation requires sustained commitment and the integration of both regional and community-based strategies to effectively curb the influence of militant groups in Africa.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study highlight the critical role that arms proliferation plays in enhancing the operational capabilities of militant groups like Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. Both groups have gained significant operational strength due to their access to illicit arms, which has enabled them to carry out large-scale, coordinated attacks across regional borders. Boko Haram has leveraged the weapons stockpiles left behind in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi and regional smuggling networks in Central Africa, while Al-Shabaab has utilized maritime trafficking routes from Yemen, facilitated by Somalia's unmonitored coastline. These illicit arms flows have empowered both groups, contributing to the intensification of violence and instability in the affected regions.

The findings demonstrate that regional and international cooperation is critical in addressing the multifaceted channels through which arms flow to these militant groups. Effective policy interventions require strengthening border controls, addressing corruption within security agencies, and bolstering regional intelligence-sharing frameworks. These actions, as suggested by Kenyan security informants and supported by recent scholarly work, could mitigate the continuous flow of arms that sustains both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab's operations across Africa.

The research also identified the primary sources and channels through which arms reach Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. The illicit networks that facilitate arms trafficking

are deeply entrenched in the regions where these groups operate, particularly in areas marked by weak governance and porous borders. While Boko Haram primarily sources its arms from the remnants of the Libyan conflict, Al-Shabaab's trafficking routes are concentrated around the Horn of Africa, utilizing both sea routes and land corridors that pass through neighboring states. These findings underscore the complex and varied nature of the illicit arms trade, which must be addressed in a context-sensitive manner.

Finally, the study assessed the roles of regional and international actors in combating arms proliferation and mitigating the impact of these groups. While regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) have made valuable contributions, their efforts are often undermined by limited resources, logistical challenges, and political fragmentation. Similarly, international actors such as the United Nations (UN) and Western nations have supported regional efforts but often face difficulties in enforcing arms embargoes and tracking illicit arms shipments. This highlights the need for stronger coordination and more robust enforcement mechanisms to curb the spread of weapons and reduce the threat posed by these militant groups.

## **Recommendations**

The success of any strategy to combat arms proliferation in Africa hinges on improved regional cooperation. The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), the African Union (AU), and other regional organizations must strengthen their coordination efforts to ensure a unified approach to countering Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and other militant groups. Enhanced intelligence-sharing, joint military operations, and integrated border control measures should be prioritized. This will require the consolidation of resources and capabilities across the affected states to create a more coordinated and effective regional response.

One of the primary challenges in curbing arms proliferation is the weakness of border controls in many of the affected countries. Governments must invest in strengthening their border security, particularly in porous regions such as the Lake Chad Basin and the Horn of Africa. This includes increasing surveillance, deploying border patrols, and using technological tools such as drones and satellite imaging to track illicit movements. Additionally, more effective customs inspections and monitoring of key transit points would prevent arms from reaching insurgent groups.

While regional efforts are vital, international support is crucial to effectively combat the illicit arms trade. The United Nations and other international organizations must provide more robust support for arms embargo enforcement, particularly in conflict zones like Somalia and Libya. This could include increased monitoring of shipping routes, improved detection technologies at ports, and stronger sanctions on countries and actors who violate arms trade agreements. Moreover, international actors must play a more proactive role in ensuring compliance with arms embargoes and trade regulations.

Long-term solutions to arms proliferation and militancy in Africa must go beyond simply stopping the flow of weapons. It is essential to address the underlying causes of conflict, such as political instability, weak governance, and economic marginalization. Governments, regional organizations, and international actors should focus on strengthening governance frameworks, promoting economic development, and fostering social cohesion to prevent the emergence of violent extremist groups. By addressing the root causes of instability, the cycle of violence and arms proliferation can be broken, leading to more sustainable peace and security in the region.

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# TRENDS IN TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISED CRIME IN AFRICA AND INNOVATIONS IN COORDINATED RESPONSES

**Catherine Lena Kelly**

## **Abstract**

Transnational organised crime (TOC) is considered a security threat in multiple African countries and is closely linked to terrorism/violent extremism and other forms of internal political violence that affect citizens' physical safety and economic well-being. Using Political Economy Analysis to frame the problem set, this article analyses the major features of TOC in Africa. It interrogates the motivation of perpetrators of TOC and their behaviours. It also seeks to analyse the counter-TOC mechanism in place by delving into its strengths and weaknesses. By using secondary source research on TOC in Africa and drawing on primary source practitioners, this article analyses how African states and societies have been engaged in countering organised crime through multi-layered forms of coordination. While many innovative initiatives have been undertaken across the continent, significant gaps remain in the establishment of comprehensive coordination architectures on these three levels. Based on these findings, the article recommends that leaders and practitioners in the TOC sphere build upon the existing potential to enhance success in countering TOC through the expansion of information-sharing to foster "domain awareness" and through renewed efforts to strengthen accountable governance in African states and the global architecture. Both avenues for action could yield public policy innovations that bolster resilience in future.

**Keywords:** *transnational organised crime, resilience, policy coordination, Africa, illicit financial flows*

# Introduction

From a strategist's perspective, it is easy to argue that Transnational Organised Crime (TOC) is a prime security challenge in Africa. It has contributed to insecurity of citizens over the last decade. However, existing responses to counter TOC have not yet reached their full potential to leverage the power of cross-border, inter-agency, and local-level coordination of the state and societal actors whose joint work is essential in disrupting the power of criminal actors. Promising examples of coordinated action to counter and prevent threats emanating from TOC exist in many parts of Africa. However, this can be amplified through further synthesis of lessons learned along with the implementation of practical action plans to improve information sharing and transparency to this end. This paper contributes to the efforts of enhancing coordination.

Empirically, the ENACT Organised Crime Index (2023) has documented a rise in criminality across Africa over the last five years. TOC is not only a threat in itself but is a means of financing terrorism and a factor that exacerbates the adverse effects of climate change on security in many contexts. It also amplifies the challenges that African states may face in delivering security services to people in communities that are already experiencing conflict and political instability, or in communities where sources of economic livelihood are limited.

Policymakers in Africa have devoted considerable institutional attention in addressing these issues. The National Security Strategies in countries like the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2019) and the Republic of Sierra Leone (2024) have identified TOC as a threat to security and development. Regionally, there are myriad protocols and action-oriented analyses intended to bolster collective capacities to counter TOC. These include the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (2006), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Law Enforcement and Anti-Poaching Strategy, and the East African Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation (EAPCCO) work through their Counter-Terrorism Centre of Excellence. The Central African Monetary Community (CEMAC) is in the process of establishing mixed brigades to counter TOC in priority border areas in the Congo Basin (Kodmadjingar, 2024; Kombo, 2024).

At the continental level, the African Union (AU) has categorised TOC as a new security threat in the continent. The Peace and Security Council intends to re-commit to bolstering intervention in all the countries in conflict and collectively explore policy approaches



to proactively addressing emerging complex threats. This is possible through existing structures like the African Union Policing Mechanism and the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services, or through initiatives linked to the Youth, Peace, and Security or Women, Peace and Security Agenda (African Union Report, 2024, p.2).

The significance of these empirical and policy dynamics is paralleled by the attention that *Africa Amani Journal* has embarked on over the last ten years (Obwogi & Guleid, 2022; Saddam & Sanya, 2023; Thompson, 2023). Beyond the journal itself, such significance is reflected through the growing strength of Africa-focused academic publications on countering TOC. This article, therefore, seeks to demonstrate both the richness and originality of African responses to the challenges of TOC as well as the staggering complexity of the work.

## **Methodology**

To demonstrate the primary trends in TOC and examine recent successes and challenges, this article uses a Political Economy approach. Political Economy approach emphasizes the study of decisions in the context of political and economic institutions (Alt & Shepsle, 1990, p.2). Formal and informal institutions influence the incentives that various public policy actors respond to when they choose to behave in specific ways and pursue specific courses of action. This approach is useful for state and societal actors who wish to collectively address TOC since they must understand all the basics of the political economy they are working in, including the key actors involved, different forms and connectedness (spatially, financially, and organisationally), and the political, legal, and institutional context shaping the motivation of both the perpetrators and policymakers. For instance, some states are ill-equipped to counter and prevent criminal network activities due to the limited technical capacity of the practitioners or incomplete understanding of roles, responsibilities, or realities on the ground. Some states also struggle to counter TOC because of political unwillingness and benefits accrued.

Application of this approach involves an assessment of the most recent findings of a quickly growing academic and policy literature that documents empirical trends in TOC. The assessment of trends requires an inter-disciplinary review of the growing academic literature in criminology, political science, security studies, and cultural anthropology on the multiple manifestations of TOC and its drivers and implications. Comprehensive documentation of trends also requires careful attention to empirical data that African security practitioners produce on TOC with security think tanks, civil society organisations, and international organisations. It entails connecting these disparate sources of information, both qualitative and quantitative, and triangulating them to infer the current key trends in TOC.

The second component is a praxis-focused and action research-oriented analysis of the successes and challenges encountered in the multi-level efforts that African state and societal actors have made in coordinating counter-TOC. This article draws upon publicly

available summaries of African practitioners' insights on countering TOC - including materials from the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) - to highlight current innovations and lessons learned.

## **Findings**

### **Characterising Empirical Trends in TOC**

A central feature of the TOC "problem set" is the lack of an agreed-upon definition of what organised crime is. The range of activities undertaken by organised criminal groups traverse a range of geographic spaces, encompassing state and non-state actors with disparate linkages.

The United Nations (UN) Palermo Convention (2000) definition of organised criminal groups serves as a common reference for African TOC practitioners. This convention has since been ratified (Shaw, 2017, p.5). It indicates that an organised criminal group consists of at least three people and exists for a period of four years or as per the criminal code of respective countries. Organised crime becomes transnational when the activities described above include actions or have tangible effects that cross national borders.

While pointing out the ambiguities that remain in the UN articulation of TOC, many scholars agree that the concept refers to crimes involving a group of people coming together to commit crimes regularly to accumulate wealth. Often, whether African countries are transit, source, and/or destination countries for TOC, these activities are carried out along a chain that the crime entails from the production level to the consumer level. This, therefore, involves actors with a mix of licit and illicit connections to the state, society, and one another (Alemika et al., 2023, pp.2-3). African countries' legislation does not always refer to the suite of these activities overtly as organised crime, even if a considerable number of countries characterise TOC and related activities as security challenges or threats.

Given this multitudinous definition, characterising the real-world patterns of TOC also involves significant empirical nuance. Currently, one of the most comprehensive empirical data sources on the contours of TOC in Africa is the ENACT Organised Crime Index. It is produced by the Institute for Security Studies-Africa, the Global Initiative Against TOC and Interpol. It provides data on the scope and reach of criminal markets and criminal actors, as well as the degree of resilience each African country has exhibited at three points in time (ENACT 2019, 2021, and 2023). The Index has thus far revealed several actionable macro-level trends based on data collected, analysed, and validated by globally reaching and locally savvy scholars and practitioners of organised crime.

Overall, the academic and practitioner literature point to four major features of the TOC landscape that leaders should consider in future, including but not limited to multiple markets and the collusion of state and criminal actors; diversity of sectors in government

and parts of society required for resilience; the overlap with other forms of insecurity; and the linkage to livelihoods.

A little explanation will help in understanding this. First, the ENACT Organised Index shows that human and arms trafficking, and non-renewable resource crimes are the three most widespread criminal markets across the continent. TOC is enabled primarily by the collusion of state-embedded actors (some senior state officials engaged in corrupt activities that enable TOC) with criminal networks. Aspects of these relationships are documented in the AU Commission and UN Economic Commission for Africa's Report of the High-Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa and in foundational Africanist scholarship on organised crime (Shaw & Ellis, 2015; UNECA, 2015). TOC is also committed, albeit less prominently, by a mix of foreign actors (individual criminals working outside of their country of origin), mafia-style groups (non-state armed groups of various sorts who are identifiable by the populace where they operate), and private sector actors (ENACT, 2019). East Africa for instance, is the region that has scored highest for overall criminality from 2019 to 2023, and West Africa has consistently ranked second (ENACT, 2023).

Second, ENACT tracks twelve factors affecting the resilience of each country to TOC: political leadership and governance, government transparency and accountability, international cooperation, national policies and laws, judicial capacity, law enforcement capacity, anti-money laundering, economic regulatory capacity, victim and witness support, prevention, non-state actor involvement in response, and territorial integrity (ENACT, 2019). As of 2023, West Africa exhibited the highest levels of resilience to TOC, and Central Africa the lowest. However, the West, Central, and Southern African countries have bolstered their overall resilience since 2021, while resilience has declined in East and Northern Africa (ENACT, 2023).

The convergence of multiple forms of TOC with terrorism and insurgency is a third feature of the global security landscape aspect that shapes the kinds of policy responses. The original convergence thesis states that:

“violent non-state actors, including terrorist organisations and insurgent movements, seek to collaborate with criminal networks—and in some cases become criminal networks—in order to finance acts of terrorism and purchase the implements of destruction and killing, and that they have been especially empowered to do so in the age of key megatrends like the expansion of the cyber domain, the emergence and proliferation of new technologies, and the take-off of urbanization and demographic growth (Miklaucic & Brewer, 2013).

Organisations like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia are commonly offered as examples. The strategic implication of Convergence Theory is that state responses to TOC and the other forms of violence that accompany it must be multi-sectoral, rather than relying solely on a law enforcement or military response. This is because “increasing convergence gives them the ever-improved ability to evade official countermeasures and

overcome logistical challenges as well as ever better tools for exploiting weaknesses and opportunities within the state system and attacking that system” (Miklaucic & Brewer, 2013).

Convergence has played out in different configurations across the African security landscape. For instance, Al-Shabaab is arguably an organisation that has internalized both terrorist and organised criminal functions within its institutional structure. This is not as much the case with Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin or with the changing configurations of jihadist groups that have operated in Algeria and the Sahel since the 1990s. Sometimes, the situation may look more like cooperation, whereby violent extremist and organised criminal groups remain separate organisations but proactively decide to work with each other, or like coexistence, when they overlap territorially in their work but do not seek each other’s services and goods (Alda & Sala, 2014; Boukhars & Kelly, 2022; Mahmood, 2018; Rosato, 2017).

However, perhaps even more important for resilience-building measures to counter TOC in these contexts is the possibility that, even when terrorism and violent extremism do not converge with TOC activities, a single criminal network can engage in multiple forms of TOC. A single source of corruption in government can facilitate multiple types of TOC. A single geographic area can exhibit vulnerabilities that make it attractive for multiple criminal markets. Consider, for example, the illegal mining challenges currently faced in the forested areas of Ghana, where timber trafficking is also a concern. Another example is the small arms and light weapons trafficking in the Karamoja region of East Africa that has facilitated more organised and large-scale forms of cattle rustling than what this time-honoured cultural practice used to entail.

Convergence and its related manifestations matter because they shape the strategic response required of African states to counter TOC. Questions of convergence have arisen after a Cold War period in which there was a considerable flow of small arms and light weapons to the continent. These inflows created further enabling conditions for other forms of trafficking, poaching, and smuggling, which combined with factors like the growth of the container trade, the rise of mobile phone use and accessibility to the Internet to increase the opportunities that global criminal networks had to connect with local actors susceptible to engaging in illicit activities (Shaw, 2017, p. 4). Furthermore, since 2000, the continent has witnessed increased scrutiny and crackdown on drug trade routes that had previously linked Latin American cartels through Africa to Europe. With heavier counter-narcotics efforts occurring in the Caribbean, transport routes shifted to African locations more than before (Shaw, 2017, p. 8).

Under these conditions, criminal actors can quickly adapt to African states’ attempts to counter TOC, shifting the types of crime they engage in, the location and routes of their operations, and the methods of concealment that they use to make their detection and punishment more difficult. African states, just like those in other parts of the

world facing similar challenges, are inherently less nimble than the criminal actors. Because they are larger entities and committed to respecting inter-agency processes, international norms and standards, and commitments to military professionalism and the rule of law, states take action in slower (even if also, ideally, more accountable) ways. Although disadvantageous for quick reaction, this slower movement may nonetheless be necessary.

The fourth and overarching empirical point about TOC in Africa comes from the critical security studies scholars who have done immersive research on the “hidden narratives” of TOC in communities (Klantschnig et al., 2020). In many cases, illicit economies that include elements of organised crime in the range of activities can play essential roles in providing sources of livelihood for citizens and preventing grievances that could arise without those economic opportunities. Therefore, it is important for policymakers to understand “bottom-up vision[s] of illicit activities” because they “demonstrate how defining and understanding these practices through such binary terms as legal/illegal or licit/illicit does not necessarily indicate how those engaged in them perceive them” (Klantschnig 2023 et al., 2023, p.330).

A classic example is the 2015 legal reform that Niger undertook to criminalise migrant transport, which was intended to reduce human smuggling from the Agadez region to North Africa. Residents tended to view participation in the human smuggling enterprise – or related markets like property rental or meal provision for the actors transporting migrants – as socially acceptable and economically legitimate, even if such activities were “quasilegal” (Frowd et al., 2023). Employment in these sectors was a prime source of livelihood (Brachet, 2018). State security actors were also engaged in taxation of quasilegal activities, with the forbearance of their superiors based in Niamey, who had invested in refraining from actions that would foster grievance or destabilize Agadez (Raineri, 2018).

After the passage of the 2015 law, the volume of human smuggling is generally agreed to have declined, but it has had other negative externalities on peace and security. For instance, smugglers began taking more dangerous and difficult routes out of Agadez, rendering those transported more vulnerable. Some citizens looking for sustainable livelihoods became more likely than before to turn to other forms of illicit activity – like illegal mining or drug trafficking (Armstrong, 2020). However, others who had spent their careers before 2015 as officially recognised and unionised transport workers felt that unemployment (and redress vis-à-vis the states for criminalising their historical profession) was their only viable alternative (Frowd et al., 2023). This example is one of several that scholars have deeply examined to demonstrate that amplifying “market insiders’ own understanding of their activities” and incorporating these perspectives into policymaking could enhance the quality of state responses to TOC, given the downstream effects of illicit economies on other formal and informal economic activity (Frowd et al., 2023, p. 379).

## **Practical Approaches to Countering TOC**

A fundamental aspect underpinning strategic plans to counter TOC is the coordination of multi-sectoral, multi-country, and locally owned efforts to mitigate the activities of criminal actors. Coordination mechanisms and processes can help build African states and societal resilience to TOC. Resilience is defined here as improving the ability of leaders, institutions, systems, and citizens to deal with TOC in ways that are adaptable, mitigate harm, and reduce future vulnerabilities (USAID, 2012, p.5). The public policy literature defines coordination as the process of trying to make different parts of a system and its component actors and institutions work together more effectively (Peters, 2018). At its best, coordination minimizes competition and reinforces complementarity among the entities that must work together to achieve a strategic goal like countering TOC. Coordination then becomes a tool that helps multi-sectoral leaders solve a common problem like TOC in a way that no single institution could by itself (DeWitt & Dillinger, 2015; Peters, 2018).

Over the last five years, ACSS has developed a curriculum rooted in this approach that it has used to foster peer learning and experience sharing amongst senior-level officials from the army, navy, police, intelligence, customs, justice, forestry, and other sectors in many African countries about successes and challenges in coordinating to counter TOC. The lectures of African experts who delivered content for this curriculum are available online, and the present analysis draws from their original contributions and related summaries that the author has written about the programs for which the content was delivered (ACSS, 2021c; 2023a; 2024). These resources contain collective knowledge about three useful dimensions of coordination: cross-border coordination between different countries' security and justice actors, interagency and interministerial coordination within countries, and coordination efforts that are rooted in local citizen and community perspectives, experiences, and approaches to dealing with TOC (ACSS, 2021a; 2021b).

Coordination across a country's ministries, departments, and agencies involved in countering TOC is one piece of the puzzle. Common trends have included passing provisions for judicial police to deploy jointly with the military to counter TOC; setting up special units focused on TOC that combine military officers, police, and gendarmes in their strategic deployments to borderlands. It also involves linking special judicial units or justice sector focal points to their counterparts in the military, law enforcement, and intelligence branches of the security sector" (ACSS, 2021a).

There is frequent need for more security and justice sector communication about people who have been apprehended, arrested, and/or tried for organised crime. Improved communications can help military and police officials better understand the human rights standards that prosecutors and magistrates must ensure to be able to put potential perpetrators on trial, as well as the evidence collection and preservation standards that help them make the trial fair. Military and police officials who are involved in chain-of-



custody interactions do not always learn the outcomes of the cases they hand over, which denies them opportunities for self-introspection (Nozawa & Lefas, 2018).

Botswana offers an example of innovation here, with its establishment of a “justice forum” between security service officials and magistrates that has met regularly to solidify a shared understanding of where the government as a whole stands in its efforts to prosecute poaching and other wildlife crimes. The justice forum was one part of a larger effort by the Botswanan government to track its implementation of the SADC Law Enforcement and Anti-Poaching Strategy. A national anti-poaching coordinating committee meets weekly to share operational updates from multiple sectors, consolidate information about strategy implementation, and report to the cabinet (Peke, 2021).

Another common area of challenge and innovation is fusing generalised and specialised expertise needed for a holistic response to TOC. Achieving the appropriate combination of general and specific knowledge from the coordination process is an inherent challenge. For example, in Somalia, after the 2017 transition, the Office of the Prime Minister established mechanisms for enhancing national and regional security officials’ coordination with the military, police, and intelligence branches of the security sector to address terrorism and TOC threats posed by Al-Shabaab. Simultaneously, efforts were made on anti-money laundering and in addressing illegal migration. The multi-sectoral push – on a general level and on specific aspects of TOC – made the Prime Minister’s Office a hub for partners offering resources, creating both opportunities for improved coordination that combines general and specific expertise, as well as heightened competition amongst actors at high levels of the hierarchy (Gaid, 2021).

Cross-border coordination is another prominent element of response to TOC in Africa. There is no shortage of Regional Economic Community (REC) programmes and projects aimed at countering TOC. The mosaic of tools that RECs have created is multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary. Beyond formal protocols designed to facilitate joint action to counter various forms of TOC (which are important frameworks but often have implementation gaps), multiple RECs have early warning systems and analysts who share information and analyse data about emerging threats and challenges, as well as sources of vulnerability and resiliency to challenges including TOC. Some entities, have a specific line of effort on countering TOC, as is the case for the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD)’s Security Sector Program (Muluneh, 2021). Regional police chiefs’ cooperation organisations for the Central, Eastern, Southern, Western, and African regions have also been at the forefront of strategic planning to counter TOC and emerging efforts to collaborate inter-regionally (ACSS, 2021). The East Africa Police Chiefs Coordination Organisation (EAPCCO)’s Counterterrorism Centre of Excellence has even engaged with the convergence trends to address the linkages of terrorism with TOC (EAPCCO, 2024).

Judicial training and communication networks – like the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network, the West African Network of Prosecutors and Central Authorities (WACAP),



and the Judicial Regional Platform of the Indian Ocean Commission – are additional cross-national tools for cross-border coordination. While they facilitate more efficient formal processes for mutual legal assistance and extradition, they also help judicial authorities from different countries to build trusting relationships with one another that can enhance informal communications and collaborations as well. For example, as it has trained prosecutors and bolstered the capacity of central authorities to formally engage in judicial cooperation, the WACAP has also enabled participants

to use informal channels to provide information to each other that has facilitated state action when formal mechanisms were not fast enough for response (WACAP, 2020; Kelly, 2023).

Cross-border coordination has been pursued on the neighbour-to-neighbour level, too. In the Southern and Eastern African regions, some neighbouring countries convene Joint Permanent Commissions on countering TOC; during the pandemic, for example, Ministers of Defence of Botswana and Zambia met to facilitate the countering drug trafficking, poaching, and irregular migration through mutual legal assistance, extradition, and joint military training (Lusaka Times, 2022). Yet even when these formal agreements bear fruit, implementation gaps can be difficult to bridge. Political will at high levels of the state to counter TOC may be missing, even if other senior leaders are invested in the efforts, and the resourcing of institutions to do complex, cross-border work also requires policy prioritization and advocacy.

Locally rooted coordination work is essential, as well. Counter TOC responses are difficult to implement if, during their development, they do not include the communities and citizens who are from areas of the country that are most affected by TOC. Their co-ownership of counter TOC efforts with national-level and regional officials can make or break the success of coordination, because implementation needs to be appropriately contextualized in order to succeed. Often, communities located in areas near national borders are highly exposed to the political and economic effects of illicit trades, including aspects related to TOC. In many cases, they have less access to services that the state is supposed to provide because of their distance from the country's capital, the centre of gravity for public goods provision. Factors like whether there are alternative livelihoods to organised crime, and whether citizens in border communities feel connected to (and trust) the state, fundamentally shape whether state efforts to counter TOC are likely to

**Counter TOC responses are difficult to implement if, during their development, they do not include the communities and citizens who are from areas of the country that are most affected by TOC. Their co-ownership of counter TOC efforts with national-level and regional officials can make or break the success of coordination, because implementation needs to be appropriately contextualized in order to succeed.**

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be seen as viable, legitimate, and desirable in such settings (Kelly, 2023; Klantschnig et al., 2023; Shaw & Reitano, 2014).

While countering TOC is not the principal goal of border governance or local governance work, it nevertheless addresses multiple factors that can enable TOC to become an attractive livelihood (or an enterprise that is socially accepted). For example, in Senegal, the border commission has built 26 “Cultural Centres for Citizenship and Good Neighborliness” (Cases culturelles de la citoyenneté et du bon voisinage) in villages near Mali, Mauritania, and The Gambia. They are civic spaces for people to engage in collective discussion, resolve conflicts, enhance their sense of Senegalese citizenship, and build cross-border trust in their neighbours. They are also places where the state can offer them opportunities for civic education, youth training in leadership, and training for local army and police officials on conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Ndiaye, 2021). Benin’s Agency for the Integrated Management of Border Spaces has done similar work in communities near the northern border, an area affected significantly by TOC and more recently, violent extremism. They focus on strengthening the social contact on increasing the presence of security services in communities, providing legal aid on civil matters that can increase access to social services, and strengthening legal livelihood opportunities for community members (Baglo, 2021).

Countries that have undertaken significant reforms in decentralization, like Kenya, have also developed models of community policing and local development that are relevant to infuse into strategic-level dialogue about enhancing national-local coordination to counter TOC (Finch, 2015; Mkutu, 2018).

### **Recommendations for Enhancing Coordination**

In the context of the ongoing coordination efforts, there are also related issue areas where experts suggest that further innovation by African policymakers and practitioners is worthy of investment. The first area is that of enhancing information, data analysis and intelligence sharing on TOC. These different types of sharing are needed more systematically amongst the multi-sectoral set of actors who are concerned with TOC and hope to coordinate a holistic response. Here, practitioner wisdom from maritime domain awareness initiatives (and, if available, analysis of lessons learned from counterterrorism fusion centre efforts) may be instructive for experts to examine further so that successes can be replicated and pitfalls can be avoided as information, data analysis, and intelligence sharing on TOC continue.

Maritime domain awareness is “a process that collects, fuses, and analyses data about activities in, and the conditions of, the maritime environment and then disseminates the data gathered and analysis results to decision makers” (Nimmich & Goward, 2015, p.63). Mechanisms for enhancing maritime domain awareness were developed through the 2013 Yaounde Code of Conduct. This non-binding agreement was designed to foster coordination between the 25 signatory states from West and Central Africa, as well as on

an inter-regional level between ECOWAS, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission on issues like piracy, armed robbery at sea, and illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing (ACSS, 2023b; Mboob, 2022). The Inter-Regional Coordination Centre is a strategic-level institution that facilitates information sharing between two regional maritime security centres for West and Central Africa), which each respectively liaise in similar ways with sub-regional (zonal) multinational coordination centres and national maritime operations centres. The Yaounde Architecture Regional Information System remains a principal enabling tool (YARIS, 2024).

Promising initiatives exist to facilitate information sharing and domain awareness for other forms of TOC. For flora and fauna crimes, for example, the Central African Forest Commission has several databases related to forest governance and illegal flora and fauna trades in the region that it draws upon to support its realization of strategic objectives. For issues that relate to TOC in the environmental domain, the Central Africa Forestry Observatory (OFAC) database and the Africa-Trade in Wildlife Information Exchange (Africa-TWIX) database are useful tools that certain forestry, wildlife, and customs sector officials can use to jointly analyse patterns in the perpetration of TOC that affect the region (OFAC, 2024; TRAFFIC, 2024).

These information-sharing tools exist alongside complementary efforts to foster coordinated strategic action to counter TOC by the CAPCCO, CEMAC, ECCAS, and the Lusaka Agreement Task Force. By 2025, with the permission and appointments of CEMAC member states, CAPCCO will deploy “mixed brigades” of gendarmes, police, eco guards, customs agents, and other officials to coordinate on the facilitation of licit inter-state commerce and mobility, including by sharing information at border posts in priority areas of the region (ACSS, 2023a). This cluster of related initiatives is just one example of emerging innovations in coordination to counter TOC, which could be further strengthened through enhanced domain awareness.

There is also potential for ongoing innovation in a second area, combating the corruption in government that enables the activities of criminal networks in Africa. The role that corruption plays in shaping broader trends in TOC has long been discussed because it occurs in the context of state officials’ bureaucratic interactions with both legal commercial entities and actors who are linked to criminal networks (UNECA, 2015). As Shaw & Ellis (2015) describe,

“In many parts of Africa where organised criminal activity can be identified, it is associated with a set of relationships generally involving senior figures within the state or important local power brokers, as well as professional criminals. Organized criminal activity is often concerned with channelling or directing resource flows from or to African countries over a period and in an organised way for the purpose of illicit gain” (p.7).

The report of the High-Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) in Africa (2015) further contextualises how anti-corruption efforts should sit within a broader architecture that African states develop to curb the flight of over \$88 billion a year in illicit financial flows. Research undertaken for the Panel finds that “large commercial corporations are by far the biggest culprits of illicit outflows, followed by organised crime” and that “corrupt practices in Africa are facilitating these outflows, apart from and in addition to... weak governance capacity” (UNECA, 2015, p.3). Anti-corruption efforts, it argues, will thus involve multiple types of ad initiatives. Some suggestions include strengthening anti-money laundering institutions in national, regional, and global arenas through organisations like the Financial Action Task Force. This is possible through enhancing financial intelligence sharing across African countries; advocating for reform to the international tax regime; enhancing African states’ regulations on how multinational corporations deal with funds that could be linked to IFFs; domesticating and harmonising laws related to the UN Convention Against Corruption and the AU Convention of Preventing and Combating Corruption. The High-Level Panel also underscored the importance of technical training and capacity building for African officials to thoroughly investigate and prosecute criminal actors involved in money laundering activities related to TOC and IFFs, and the strengthening of national anti-corruption institutions.

The ENACT Organised Crime Index presents a complementary finding with a further set of policy implications. It points out that certain high-level state officials (state-embedded actors) facilitate the ability of criminal networks to engage in TOC and that such officials often extract private gain from such facilitation in the process. This pattern appears to be more successful in African countries with “less developed resilience frameworks” (ENACT, 2023, p.97). The resilience frameworks that apply to the correlation revealed by the ENACT data include several of the factors identified by the High-Level Panel (law enforcement and justice sector capacities, international agreements, economic regulations, and anti-money laundering measures). They also encompass other factors worthy of attention, like bolstering victim and witness protections for whistle-blowers and preserving and nurturing civic space so that civil society groups and independent media outlets can contribute to external oversight.

Similarly, ACSS programming on countering TOC has also fostered peer learning among senior officials that generated the recommendation to increase practical literacy about how to combat corruption in national and local governance arenas related to TOC. Another idea that they have presented is to link military, law enforcement, justice, forestry, wildlife, and fisheries sector actors to national anti-corruption commissions to develop recurring, working-level relationships. Calls have also been made for African countries’ international partners to do more work with security/justice/environmental sectors and civil society, with a focus on strengthening whistle-blower protections and on bringing national human rights institutions into the security sector’s dialogue about approaches to countering TOC (ACSS, 2021a; 2023a).

## Conclusion

The multi-sectoral nature of countering TOC in Africa makes the organisation of strategic, coordinated responses quite challenging. Yet, the immense efforts that this project requires could well be worth it, given that TOC is not only a concern in and of itself but can also be a source or an amplifier of other security threats. This article sought to use the most recent empirical research on TOC – from a diverse range of epistemic communities that approach the issue through contrasting lenses – to provide an updated description of the “political economy” of organised crime in Africa. Each country and community have a different context in which TOC occurs. Yet, there are common ways to characterise progress that African officials, practitioners, activists, and thought leaders have made to coordinate their efforts to address the negative effects of TOC on human security. Current efforts are rich in proof of the interlocking nature of multiple layers of coordination and attest to the importance of using diverse communities of practice to foster further innovation. Learning from the past and looking to the future are both key for catalysing strategic solutions on this security challenge.

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# CLIMATE-INDUCED DEPRIVATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS TO CONFLICT IN NORTHERN KENYA

**Fred Jonyo**  
**Philip Kaudo**

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the multidimensional role of youth in the protracted Las Anod conflict between Somaliland and the SSC-Khatumo. The study provides an overview of the youth's involvement in conflict by reviewing secondary data using a desktop research methodology. The research also underlines how economic marginalization, political instability, and historical grievances considerably contribute to youth involvement in armed groups. The study uses desktop research through a review of existing literature collected from secondary data. The paper recommends the provision of economic empowerment, political inclusion, and strategic use of technology in ways that positively tap the youths' potential for peacebuilding. The findings showed that youth play a very critical role in perpetuating the conflict and in its resolution. Their active involvement is crucial for achieving long-term peace and stability in Las Anod.

***Keywords: Las Anod, youth participation, community and political engagement, Somaliland, Somalia***

# Introduction

**N**orthern Kenya is among the least developed regions in Kenya. According to the World Bank Report (2021), this region is historically marginalised and underserved. The development performance is below the national average on development indicators. The region's poverty level is estimated at above 70%, compared to the 58% national average with averagely only 45% of the households having access to water (World Bank Report, 2021). Turkana and Marsabit counties presented a dire development context, with the report findings indicating that 90% of their population, translating to approximately 1.2 million people, living below the absolute poverty line. The region is largely arid and semi-arid experiencing recurrent droughts and famine which create vulnerabilities for the population. According to the World Bank report (2021), 90% of the population in Northern Kenya are nomadic pastoralists.

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For decades, Northern Kenya has witnessed several inter-community conflicts, including Borana-Gabbara conflicts, Borana and Rendile skirmishes, Garre and Murulle tussle, and Borana and Somali clan violence, among others. The causes and patterns of these conflicts remain complex and intertwined. According to Kumssa(2011), the causes of conflict in the Northern region can be attributed to multifaceted factors, including competition over scarce resources, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, cattle rustling, inadequate policing, and the diminishing role of the traditional system of governance. He adds the region experiences violent skirmishes between refugees and local communities over access to resources like water and shelter. The differences arising from unequitable distribution of humanitarian aid from both state and non-state actors also fuels the tension.

The conflicts in the Northern Kenya present multiple consequences to the locals and state actors as well. The conflicts have been linked to several fatalities, forced migrations, underdevelopment, and frustrated efforts to public service delivery, such as access to education and medical services. As Collier et al. (2003) opined, conflicts result in reverse development. Other researchers including Cappelli et al. (2024), Mason et al. (2021), and Kelly et al. (2015), have focused on contemporary conflicts in society, characterized by negative realities of globalization, increase in economic vulnerabilities, state failures,

and climate changes. Their findings reiterate that climate change is a major security concern in contemporary society.

Globally, there exists a general lack of consensus on the correlation between climate change and violent conflicts. Whereas some scholars argue that there exists a linear correlation between the two, other scholars argue that climate change is only an indirect driver of conflicts. Buhaug (2017) reiterates that though it is widely accepted that climate change presents challenges that exacerbate violent conflicts, the exact mechanism and links of how climate change relates to violent conflicts remain inconclusive and highly debatable. Hilhost et al. (2019) concluded that climate-related changes heighten the risk of conflicts-affected contexts and fragile areas. Krampe and de Coning (2020), on the other hand, argue that climate change should not be considered the main driver of violent conflicts, but rather one among the several social, economic, and political factors that drive the development of violent conflicts.

Etzold & Muller-Kone (2023), argue that though climate changes undermine livelihoods and result in insecurity, there exists no linear relationship between drought, conflict, and food security, implying that prolonged droughts do not necessarily lead to violent conflicts nor lead to hunger crises. Their findings therefore reiterate that climate variability is a threat multiplier to conflict. Their study, based in Marsabit County, observed that the two main channels of impact between food security and climate change were the displacement of pastoralists and the destruction of people's livelihoods.

While Kenya has been a unit of analysis on the nexus between climate change and conflict dimension, Northern Kenya has consistently been recognized as a vulnerable region in terms of preference of conflicts, climate-induced deprivations, and increased mobility of the population. The rationale for considering Northern Kenya as a case study is that the region has frequently been linked to climate-induced conflicts. In addition, the region has a high dependence on resources such as water and pastures, which are easily deprived due to climate changes (Opiyo et al. 2015). Given that the region has also been mapped as a security hotspot, it presents an interesting scenario for understanding the nexus of the conflict dimensions experienced in the region and climate change.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

This study aligns with the philosophical underpinning of Environmental Conflict Theory as propounded by Thomas Homer Dixon (2010). Etzold, & Müller-Koné, (2023) opine that environmental scarcity of resources contributes to civil violence and ethnic clashes. Homer identifies 9 environmentally affiliated changes that may contribute to insecurities: high energy consumption, population increase, loss of biodiversity, cropland scarcity, ozone depletion, decline of fish stock, and global warming. This theory implies that environmental scarcities is a threat multiplier or factor that exacerbates conflicts.

Homer further contends that the general decline in critical environmental resources

such as forests, grazing fields, and croplands has the potential to contribute to conflicts. Though they do not cause conflicts directly, the scarcities generate social stresses or social cleavages that stimulate urban unrest, civil wars, and ethnic tensions. The Theory concludes that violence and disruptions leading to scarcity can be mitigated by the ability of society to generate ideas that can help solve technical and social problems.

This Theory very relevant given that it emphasizes the nexus between climate change or environmental scarcities and violence. It, therefore, suits the study, given that Northern Kenya is characterized by extreme scarcities of resources and is a victim of state marginalization. The theory provides the necessary constructs for understanding the correlation between climate change and insecurity.

### **Research Design**

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. The study used a case study research design using an in-depth analysis of the Northern Kenya counties of Garissa, Wajir, and Turkana. A total of 15 key informants were purposively sampled for the study that included officials from the national government administration, Non-Governmental Organizations domiciled in the study location, and local leaders, religious and opinion leaders. Primary data was thematically analyzed which involved deriving core themes from the interviewee's responses. Primary findings were augmented with a critical desktop review of Northern Kenya to understand the conflict trends and patterns in Northern Kenya.

### **Dimensions of Conflicts in Northern Kenya**

Northern Kenya is one of the security hotspots in Kenya. The region, faced with historical marginalization and injustices has witnessed intermitted conflicts over time. Internal conflicts are a major conflict dimension in Northern Kenya (Etzold, & Müller-Koné, 2023). These conflicts range from cattle raids to competition over grazing fields, pasture, and water resources. The intra-ethnic conflicts are primarily manifested between farmers and herders and between clans within communities. For instance, nomadic pastoralists from Isiolo, Marsabit, Baringo, and Moyale, periodically move to the agricultural areas of Turkana, in search of grazing fields and water, hence resulting in inter-ethnic animosity that sometimes transitions into violent conflicts. Conflicts in Marsabit County, for instance, have largely involved the Gabra and the Borana communities who are constantly in contestation and competition for access to grazing fields and water points. In Tana River County, internal conflicts between the Pokomo and the Orma have largely been fueled by climate change (Kipkemoi et al, 2017). The Pokomo who inhabit the riverbanks are largely farmers while the Orma are herders. During dry seasons, the Orma, in search of greener pastures and water pass through the river banks inhabited by the Pokomo, destroying the crops and hence resulting in conflicts. Noteworthy, the Borana and the Pokot communities frequently raid their neighbouring Turkana villages for control over resources.

Northern Kenya also experiences transnational conflicts. Most of the citizens in Northern Kenya are nomadic pastoralists and therefore, are frequently on the move in search of water and pasture. As a result, pastoral communities regularly engage in scuffles with pastoralists from neighbouring communities from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Uganda due to scarcity of resources. For example, Turkana County experiences recurrent transnational raids by neighbouring communities, including the Dongiro community from Ethiopia and the Moroto, Jie, and Matheniko from Uganda. These raids are largely caused by unclear demarcation of boundaries especially along traditional migratory routes. Ecological challenges including the shrinking of water levels in Lake Turkana, have equally made the communities dependent on it to be in conflict with other communities over the control of the water bodies.

Political violence is also a major conflict dimension in Northern Kenya. Clan affiliations have resulted in politics of exclusions in Northern Kenya. The region has frequently been subjected to political incitement, as leaders struggle to mobilize power within their clans. In Mandera County, for instance, a study conducted by Osamaba (2000) linked the intermittent wars between the Garre and Murulle clans as largely caused by clan supremacy and chauvinism. Political players rally their clans against other clans for political advantage. Fratkin (1994) argues that political leaders can perpetuate conflicts through their acts of omission or commissions. They can engage in exclusionary politics including through propaganda that targets some clans or communities. In the same vein, especially in nomadic pastoralist areas, the political class and even the warlords may sponsor intercommunity / clan raids, to enhance political leverage against opponents or as a strategy for resource mobilization for campaigns. Therefore, politicians and other capitalists may take advantage of the economic vulnerabilities of society, exacerbated by climate change, to advance their selfish agenda of resource exploitation in the regions.

The conflict dimensions in Northern Kenya have exposed the region to diverse consequences. Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Report (2023) indicated that in the period between January to March 2023, 69 cases of pastoralist violence were reported in Northern Kenya, representing a 77% increase in the period from October to December 2022. Violence in Northern Kenya has also contributed to several fatalities and resulted in human displacements. The severity of conflicts in the region has prompted the government of Kenya to integrate a blend of security measures to contain the preference of conflicts, including declaring a 30-day curfew in Northern Kenya in both February and March 2023. The government also deployed security forces in the security hotspots and provided a disarmament amnesty in the region.

## Findings

One of the key informants interviewed for this study said,

*“Conflicts in Northern Kenya are largely shaped by the characteristics of the region, including the environmental, socio-political, and historical context (history of marginalization) of the region”.*

Respondents noted that environmental shocks for instance amplify the scarcity of resources hence resulting in intense struggles or competition over ownership of the resources. This is aggregated by the fact that the majority of populations in Northern Kenya are nomadic pastoralists who rely on animals and access to pasture and water for livelihoods. When these resources become overstretched, locals engage in tussle over their control and dominance, especially among pastoralists themselves or between pastoralists and farmers. Turkana County for instance is among the least developed counties in Kenya and suffers severe drought and famine which is considered a potential source of conflicts. Etzold, & Müller-Koné, (2023) indicated that Turkana has an absolute poverty index, estimated at 79.4%. This has coincided with unreliable rainfall patterns and high temperatures that range between 20 degrees Celcius to 38 degrees Celcius. The short rains and long rains range from 52mm to 480mm annually (Omolo & Mafongoya, 2019).

Droughts and famines in the Northern Kenya exacerbate mobility or migration across local, national and international borders as an adaptive mechanism to climate variability and search for common necessities such as water, pasture and food. An official of the National Government Administration interviewed noted that in Turkana for instance, locals are heavily armed with light weapons as a defensive mechanism against cattle raiding. Conflicts in regions have, therefore, evolved from a cultural crime to a more complex crime, including transnational conflicts in contemporary society (Osamba, 2000).

The study findings on climate-induced conflicts in Northern Kenya corroborate the findings of Mkutu & Wandera (2016). A case analysis of Turkana County reiterated that inter-communal conflicts in the region are largely linked to competition for essential resources. While emphasizing the transnationality of the conflicts between the Merille clans and the Dassanech from Ethiopia and the Ilerat clans from Marsabit County focus on cattle raids and fishing conflicts in Lake Turkana. The Turkana community is also faced with retaliation of armed raids from the Toposa and Dodoth from South Sudan and Uganda.

An official of the National Government interviewed for this study, also noted that the conflict between the Merrille of Ethiopia and the Turkana communities is climate-induced. She argued that the conflicts intensify during the dry seasons, implying a positive relationship between climate change and conflict over scarce resources. For instance, there are sporadic conflicts between farmers and pastoralists, especially given that an estimated 20% population of Turkana are farmers and practice mixed farming along the shores of Lake Turkana. The pastoralists during the dry seasons herd their cattle along the lake destroying their farms, hence invoking inter-communal conflicts.

Critical resources that induce conflicts in Northern Kenya include the struggle to control Lake Turkana and Omo River from Ethiopia. During drought seasons, there is a decline



of water, and this prompts both the Turkana and the Merille communities to migrate to the Omo River Delta which is traditionally considered as the borderline of the two communities. This invokes conflicts as the two communities struggle to control the resources for their cattle and farms.

In Garissa, environmental shocks and stress also intensify the scarcity of resources and competition for available ones. The study found that unpredictable environmental shocks not only reduce food availability but also limit the presence of water and pasture, which are essential resources in sustaining a pastoral economy. Overstretching of water sources results in competition and control of the same, hence creating new conflicts or transitioning existing community rivalries into real conflicts. As one of the key informants of this study reiterated,

“In the past, just before serious climate changes were experienced, the migration of the pastoralists was based on established well-established routes. The movements were largely informed by the seasonality of the water resources and pasture availability. However, given the unpredictability of rainfall patterns, privatization, and urbanization in Garissa, pastoralists' migrations are undefined and are adapting to new routes, which invokes unnecessary tensions.”

The study found that climate variabilities such as floods, drought, famine, and locust invasion worsen the livelihood of the population, hence increasing their vulnerability to involvement in crime. Lack of basic human needs increases the susceptibility of people to crime which are essentially triggers of conflicts. In the traditional setup a crime like cattle rustling was considered a cultural practice aimed at replenishing livestock and also showing acts of bravery. As Osamba (2000) noted, in contemporary society, cattle rustling has undergone a fundamental transformation, from cattle rustling to an international commercial venture. A respondent from Wajir County noted that these days, pastoralists view cattle rustling as an opportunity to address their worsening economic livelihoods.

Furthermore, loss of livelihood can be a catalyst for elite exploitation of local population the study found. Landlords and the political class exploit the existing local grievances of the people of Northern Kenya, especially on the issues of land, resources, and food security, to gain political advantages and economic gains. Through disinformation and misinformation, politicians deliberately incite people on contested lands. They also aim to displace populations perceived as competitors. The political class has been accused of taking advantage of community's grievances to organize cattle raids for their economic advantage. One of the respondents noted that climate change was also an indirect pathway to insecurity given that it worsened the living conditions of the youthful populations hence a potential pathway for recruitment into violent extremist groups by extremist agents and organizations.

## Discussion

This study proposes that climate variability is a threat multiplier to conflict and therefore there exists an indirect correlation between environmental deprivations and conflicts. In the context of Northern Kenya, the study portends that climate change depletes resources, worsens livelihoods, and fosters migration, which are considered among the major stressors of conflicts. This is validated by the fieldwork findings that conflicts become much more prevalent in Northern Kenya, during drought and famine, as communities struggle for control of scarce resources such as food, pasture, and water. These findings align well with the philosophical arguments of Etzold, & Müller-Koné, (2023) which reinforced that climate variabilities cause food shortages and economic disruptions which are risk factors for conflicts. They consider livelihood disruption, occasioned by climate change, as a central intermediate variable between food insecurity and violent conflicts.

Secondly, climate variabilities have multiplied conflict actors in the region. Given the worsened livelihood, which is also orchestrated by political marginalization Environmental shocks have amplified the scarcity of resources in Northern Kenya, which result in locals engaging in criminal acts or joining militant groups. This argument is congruent, with the assertion by other scholars who argue that economic vulnerabilities are a critical pathway to crime involvement. The political class and other elites exploit the local grievances, caused by climate change such as poverty for their economic advantages such as organized cattle raids and recruitment to militant groups.

Thirdly, conflict in Northern Kenya is both inter/intra-communal and transnational in nature. Climate variabilities have spillover effects, which have occasioned cross-border conflicts, as communities from neighbouring communities struggle for control of shared resources such as Lake Turkana among others.

Theoretically, the findings are congruent with Thomas Dixon's Environmental Conflict Theory. The study affirms that conflict and environmental variability are intricately linked. Similar to the propositions of the Theory, the study findings reiterate that climate variabilities are threat multipliers of conflict, given that climate change acts in combination with other risk factors or stressors to cause/exacerbate conflicts.

In relation to policy implications, the findings reinforce that conflict actors including the state should prioritize human security approaches in addressing the proliferation of conflicts in Northern Kenya. Hard security approaches that the government currently prioritizes may not be effective in addressing conflicts. The government must work towards increasing resource allocation to conflict mitigation by cushioning the local communities on environment-associated shocks. This calls for the institutionalization of early warning systems as a conflict prevention mechanism, multisectoral engagement on matters of conflict in the Northern Kenya, and deepened community sensitization

on the nexus between climate change and conflicts and possible remedies of conflict prevention and mitigation.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, this study recommends that both state and non-state actors should invest or sensitize the locals on their need to diversify their economies. The communities should leverage pastoralism, farming, formal employment, and trading activities among other economic practices, to cushion them from the economic vulnerabilities or negative realities linked to climate change.

While state actors have integrated a blend of approaches to salvage the conflict situation in Northern Kenya, the government and its agencies should address the question of marginalization by pursuing a development agenda that aligns with the needs of these communities. For instance, the government should invest in climate change adaptation strategies such as smart agriculture.

Integrate a multi-stakeholder approach in addressing the climate-induced conflicts in Northern Kenya. Local agencies, community elders, religious leaders, and even nonstate actors should actively be involved in interventions aimed at limiting induced climate-induced crimes.

Strengthening community resilience security strategies to enhance prompt reporting of conflict trends and threats. This goes hand in hand in the government ensuring that traditional conflict resolution approaches complement new approaches in the region. This calls for the government to ensure compliance with sharing agreements, especially negotiated through community dialogues, as exemplified by the Borana Dheba resource-sharing agreements. The community should embrace climate change adaptation strategies including establishing water catchment areas and mixed farming, focusing on using climate resistance crops/ seeds to limit resource-based competitions during dry seasons.

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# SOMALILAND AND SOMALIA'S PROTRACTED STATE CRISIS: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE LAS ANOD CONFLICT

**Fatuma Ahmed Ali**

**Prof Aleksy Ylöene**

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the multidimensional role of youth in the protracted Las Anod conflict between Somaliland and the SSC-Khatumo. The study provides an overview of the youth's involvement in conflict by reviewing secondary data using a desktop research methodology. The research also underlines how economic marginalisation, political instability, and historical grievances considerably contribute to youth involvement in armed groups. The study uses desktop research through a review of existing literature collected from secondary data. The paper recommends the provision of economic empowerment, political inclusion, and strategic use of technology in ways that positively tap the youths' potential for peacebuilding. The findings showed that youth play a very critical role in perpetuating the conflict and in its resolution. Their active involvement is crucial for achieving long-term peace and stability in Las Anod.

***Keywords: Las Anod, youth participation, community and political engagement, Somaliland, Somalia***

# Introduction

Since its onset in December 2022, the latest episode of armed conflict between Somaliland forces and the Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn (SSC) -Khatumo militias has claimed more than two hundred lives and led to the displacement of approximately two hundred thousand people (Hoehne, 2023b). The city of Las Anod, located at the controversial boundary of Somaliland and Somalia, is a geographical hot spot. It is also an area where youth lives, and hope are lost in conflicts and state breakups.

The ongoing and multi-faceted conflict in the Horn of Africa has turned Las Anod into a spot of political, social, and economic conflict, where the younger generation is not only the main actors but also the victims. Las Anod's strategic position accentuates its importance in the broader struggle between Somaliland's quest for international recognition and Somalia's attempts to preserve territorial integrity (Kluijver, 2023). The Somaliland government, which declared its independence in 1991, claims Las Anod to be a part of its historical territory. In contrast, the Federal Government of Somalia sees it as an integral part of the Somali state. This split is not the only high-level political confrontation. It has a significant effect on the lives of people in Las Anod, particularly, its youth, who are struggling between various nationalisms and local problems.

As the situation evolves and internal issues increase, Las Anod's youth face complex issues to do with loyalty, identity, and existence. According to Hoehne (2023b), they actively participate in the conflict, influencing social and political dynamics through their decisions and actions. Hence, this involvement of the youth demonstrates that they are agentic, whether it is through taking part in grassroots activism and political involvement or joining militias and finding working opportunities in the informal market. Their activities reflect their personal experiences and explanations for the continuing insecurity and the lack of proper governance.

Some youth in the Horn of Africa are driven to join militant groups due to economic hardships or ideological motivations, while others engage as peacebuilders and agents of development. The experiences they face and the decisions they make provide critical insights into state fragility and the challenges to national sovereignty. These dynamics highlight the importance of active state involvement in addressing the underlying factors contributing to regional instability.

Using a desktop research method through a review of existing literature collected from



secondary data, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the role of youth in the Las Anod conflict. The authors of this article are distance observers of secessionist politics, and they have been following this conflict through social media platforms such as X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat. On these platforms, the youths have shared their accounts showing footage of the war, propagating the news of either side, and uncovering the actions of either side. Following these social media platforms has been critical because, from the beginning of this conflict, the role of the youth and social media has received relatively little attention compared to the political implications between Somalia and Somaliland and the humanitarian situation. Furthermore, social media platforms are used to create a visual framing of this conflict.

This article examines the role of the youth, their participation, community involvement, and their political engagement. It highlights their roles in the conflict as victims, perpetrators, and peacebuilding amid Somaliland and Somalia's ongoing crisis. It also provides a background of the study to gain insight into the conflict in Las Anod. The paper recognizes the youth as pivotal actors with digital proficiency and potential to drive both conflict and peace and offers recommendations to leverage their role as agents of peace and development.

### **Background to study**

As a microcosm, Las Anod (Laascanood in Somali), located in the Sool province in eastern Somalia, exemplifies the complexities and volatility of border disputes in the Horn of Africa (Mahmood, 2019). Las Anod, the city itself, as well as the SSC district, is central to the ongoing conflict between Somaliland and Somalia, driven by historical disputes and contemporary political tensions. To understand the persistent issue of Las Anod, one must consider the historical, political, and socio-economic factors that shape this complex and multifaceted conflict, which includes territorial disputes, clan rivalries, and instability, with significant involvement from the youth.

The boundary disagreement and the problems of Las Anod and the SSC region date back to the colonial era. According to Hoehne (2023a), the borders were recklessly defined by the European powers, and thus conflict arose between the members of these borders who were from different clan groups. In 1884, Somaliland, the northern region became a British Protectorate whilst the southern part, Somalia was colonized by Italy in 1889. The two protectorates were administered separately until the mid-20th century. These distinctive administrative features were the foundation for future post-colonial contentions. These territories gained independence separately and decided to join and form one sovereign state of the Somalia Republic in 1960. Unfortunately, the union did not last due to dissatisfaction from the northern residents who felt alienated and marginalized by the central government which was dominated by the southern leaders.

The contentions skyrocketed after a coup by Siad Barre in 1969 (Isak, 2021). The northerners felt more marginalized, and this led to more grievances, hence the

formation of a rebel militia group, the Somali National Movement (SNM) (Ali, 2022). This formation was spearheaded by the intellectuals and military officers from the northern region, particularly the Isaaq clan. It was this group that spearheaded a fight against Siad's regime. The Somali government tried to hold its ground through a brutal military campaign against the revolting region, which resulted in significant civilian casualties, and property, and infrastructure destruction in Hargeisa and Burao.

Finally, in 1991 the government of Barre was ousted and Somaliland proclaimed independence from Somalia, declaring its sovereignty on May 18, the same year. Based on the colonial boundaries, it claimed the SSC regions of Las Anod, which had formed part of the former British Somaliland Protectorate's boundaries (Mahmood, 2019). In contrast, the Federal Government of Somalia claims that these provinces are original parts of its nation historically connected to the central Somali state established during the Italian colonial period and later on united under the Somalia Republic in 1960.

However, despite the declared secession from Somalia, Somaliland has since then struggled to control the SSC areas and to gain international recognition, and hence faces limited functionalities. The SSC districts have the active involvement of the Dhulbahante, which is not only the largest sub-clan of the Darod clan group but also the one that has formed the most complicated alliances between the country and the neighbouring clans. Mainly they refuted the sovereign claims of Somaliland over their land (Hoehne, 2023b). These were the provisions given by the local government that were written in their constitution as they affirmed the Somaliland motion during the constitutional convention that took place in Hargeisa and then later when they had to deal with the Mogadishu courts (Prunier, 2021).

### **Contested Somaliland-Puntland Borderlands: Las Anod at the Heart of a Tangled Web of Interests**

In this context, intractable political tension and recurrent conflict in the eastern territories, emanating from more than two decades ago has again escalated. Control of the Sool region's designated administrative capital, Las Anod, has been particularly contested. The contest involves the interests of the local majority Dhulbahante, a sub-clan connected to the autonomous region of Puntland, dominated Harti clan (forming part of the Darod clan); the Isaaq clan-controlled Somaliland; the Garowe administration in Puntland, and the Somali federal government (Musa, 2021).

Since Las Anod is under Somaliland's administration and military control, the government still applies tax policies to the territory and its surroundings (Hoehne, 2023b). As a political entity, Somaliland claims the right to self-determination as separate from the larger Italian colonial Somaliland. It also claims the right to voluntarily join and separate from the former Italian Somalia. The Isaaq genocide, perpetrated by the Siad Barre

government in the 1987-1989 period, constitutes a strong historical and legal case for self-determination.

After it declared independence in 1991, the Somaliland administration claimed the boundaries of the former British Somaliland, which included the eastern Sool and Sanaag regions, as its territory (Ylönen, 2023). However, seven years later when the autonomous regional state of Puntland was formed, Harti Darod leaders in Garowe adopted a different approach and claimed all Darod clan-inhabited areas in Somalia's northeast, including those dominated by the Warsangeli, Majerteen, and Dhulbahante sub-clans, as part of Puntland (Hoehne, 2023a). These contradictory approaches and overlapping claims for control brought the strategic, resource-rich, and majority Darod-inhabited eastern Sool and Sanaag, under dispute between Hargeisa and Garowe. While many locals in Eastern Sool and Sanaag have continued to position themselves against Somaliland's independence, some have sided with Hargeisa.

Others, resenting outside attempts to manipulate the local political reality, have mobilised behind an effort to obtain increasing autonomy by disassociating the region from both Somaliland and Puntland (Ylönen, 2023). Against this background, Las Anod has been repeatedly in the eye of the storm. Large parts of the Sool and Sanaag regions have become disputed borderlands, where neither the Hargeisa nor the Garowe administration has been able to prevent anti-establishment elements, such as al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda. These periodically feed on the sentiments against Somaliland, Puntland, or federal Somalia gaining varying levels of influence (Ylönen, 2023).

In 2003 Puntland occupied and began administering the Las Anod area. Four years later, Somaliland forces expelled the Puntland military, and over the next decade and a half gradually completed the occupation of most of eastern Sool (Hoehne, 2023b; Ylönen, 2023). Hargeisa has sought to increasingly incorporate the eastern regions in Somaliland's political institutions and has overseen modest development in the area. However, it has also been seen to be biased and favouring their mainly Isaaq-inhabited western districts, especially the petroleum-rich Aynabo and Garadag (Ylönen, 2023). Despite recent attempts to ensure eastern Sool and Sanaag's further representation in Somaliland politics, the perception of marginalisation has persisted, and the Somaliland-Puntland dispute has continued to feed a sentiment of resistance (Elder, 2019).

In 2009, sections of Dhulbahante formed an autonomous regional government linked to the federal administration in Mogadishu, bypassing both Somaliland and Puntland. Later the same year, they established the Unity and Relief Agency for the Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn Regions of Somalia (URASSCR) which came to represent Dhulbahante's resistance to Somaliland and Puntland. In 2012, the resistance culminated in the establishment and the Somali Transitional Federal Government's recognition of the Khatumo regional state, which, however, subsequently eroded and ceased to operate three years later (Ylönen, 2023; Hoehne, 2023b; Elder, 2019; Mahmood, 2019). This was due to an internal

split between its elected president Ali Khalif Galaydh, whose group agreed to integrate into the Somaliland government, and vice-president Abdulle Mohamud Agalule, whose constituency endorsed Puntland's aspiration to claim control of the Sool region. The SSC militia survived the split and has continued to resist Somaliland forces in eastern Sool and advocate for the re-establishment of the Khatumo federal state with a varying degree of support from the Somali federal government (Ylönen, 2023).

The most recent escalation came with the killing of a popular young local politicians, and a local businessman, Mohamed Ali Saadle, in early January. There has been a long series of similar assassinations of mostly Dhulbahante intellectuals and officials, often those working for the Somaliland administration that forcibly took over the city at the end of 2007 (Hoehne, 2023a). The murders triggered protests the Somaliland administration and intensified fighting between the Somaliland military and SSC militia. Hargeisa's forces first tried to quell the demonstrations by force, but later withdrew from Las Anod.

As reported by SIHA (2023), most of the protesters were women and young students. The protest, however, resulted in the injury and death of scores of people after the police opened fire on the protesters (SIHA, 2023). Puntland representatives sought to capitalize on the situation by condemning Somaliland, while Hargeisa's leadership attempted to diffuse the situation by launching an investigation. This resulted in shelling and further clashes on the following day amidst Ethiopia's efforts to mediate.

The rise of violence and insecurity, led to widespread sentiment of marginalization among Dhulbahante which has increased during the latter years of Bihi administration in Hargeisa. The extension of Bihi's presidential term, which was to lapse on November 13, 2022, was met with street protests by the opposition parties whose confrontation with the security forces caused violence, leading to injuries, deaths, and detentions (Khalif, 2023b). There have also been contradicting claims about Puntland's direct involvement in fighting in Las Anod. While sources siding with Somaliland have produced material to claim that the Puntland Regional Security Forces (PSF) were involved, Puntland officials have vehemently denied such accusations (Abdirahman, 2021).

In February 2023, Somaliland pulled its troops out of Las Anod and allowed a local committee of 33 Dhulbahante clan elders to deescalate the conflict (Al Jazeera, 2023; Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, 2023). In addition, local leaders, clan elders, and prominent individuals met in Las Anod to discuss a resolution and issued a 13-point declaration, in which they reinstated the administration of the SSC-Khatumo region, denounced Somaliland as separatist and reaffirmed their commitment to be managed directly by the Federal Government Somalia in Mogadishu (Khalif, 2023a). Besieged, Las Anod was subjected to months of shelling and unsuccessful incursions by the Somaliland forces. On August 25, the SSC militia staged a surprise attack and took the Maraaga and Gojacade army bases, which led to a withdrawal of the Somaliland military to approximately 100 kilometers west to eastern Togheer and western Sool.

## Broader Political Context in Somalia and Somaliland

The discord raging in Las Anod is not solely local, it is more intricately integrated with the general political situation in Somalia and Somaliland (Öberg, 2020). To some extent, the election of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud for the second term as the President of Somalia in May 2022

seemed to be a step toward more power centralisation in Mogadishu. The presidential administration has been mainly preoccupied with the process of bringing the federal states into compliance and backing it up with the central government's war against Al-Shabaab.

These efforts, however, clashed with Somaliland's quest for separation from the rest of Somalia, as well as their control of the region including the SSC areas. Somaliland, on the other side, is striving to achieve international recognition as a sovereign state. This approach necessarily contains the control of the contentious territories, which its government perceives as a key factor in ensuring sustainability and thereby attracting investment. Recognition and economic development are the main drivers that push Somaliland to keep its grip on the SSC regions, even against local resistance (Beyene, 2019).

### Youth Participation in the Las Anod Conflict

*Dhallinyarada waa labada geesood ee dagaalka iyo nabadda*

(The youth are the two edges of war and peace)

A Somali proverb

Las Anod has a relatively young population with 61% below 20 years old (Mohamed, 2023). Ages from 15-29 make up 26% of the population whilst 74% is below 30 years and four per cent is 65 years and above (Mohamed, 2023). Therefore, the youths are an important segment of Las Anod's population, as well as being part of the benchmark of the existing assessment of the area's development measure.

According to Mohamed (2023), various estimates confirm the youth as being nearly 70% of the total population in the Sool region. This high percentage of youth is because of both high birth rates and the adverse effects of violence and armed conflict that tend to impact older people more leading to demographic imbalances. In Somalia, social development and economic growth increase birth rates. This is due to better wealth distribution and greater income diversification. The older people find difficulty in surviving amidst instability and conflict. The age distribution of the regional capital Las Anod adheres to the young age demographic pattern.

Recognition and economic development are the main drivers that push Somaliland to keep its grip on the SSC regions, even against local resistance (Beyene, 2019).

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This youth bulge comes with several advantages and hitches. While the youth population can be a driving force behind the creation of new businesses, employment, and innovative technology the youth without opportunities can also easily grow into a volatile sector causing instability by contributing to crime, violence, and armed conflict.

It was observed from the accounts of the youth on social media platforms that the young fight on the frontlines with many Millennials and Generation Z joining the war effort on the SSC side. Meanwhile, the age of the Somaliland soldiers seems to be older, mainly Generation X and some Millennials. As the younger generations tend to use technological space frequently, the spread of social media was a considerable tactic used by Generation Z to virtually frame the conflict.

### **Socio-Economic, Educational, Health, and Security Conditions of Youth in Las Anod**

The socio-economic realities in Las Anod present several issues for the youth, with one of the most significant being the backdrop of long-lasting political instability and conflicts. In Las Anod, it is difficult to find a job due to the high crime rate and territorial disputes that cause insecurity (Samatar, 2018) and deter economic activity. Currently, about 65% of the youth population is unemployed (Mohamed, 2023). Those who are employed often do not have permanent employment and the pay is low. This economic marginalisation causes despair and results in the youth being more likely to engage in armed groups to obtain financial rewards and have a sense of identity. Many young people participate in the conflict due to various factors such as socio-economic pressures, political manipulation, activism, and cultural influences which bring about an intricate network of interactions.

Access to education in Las Anod is severely restricted due to various factors such as poor transportation infrastructure, insecurity, and poverty. Many educational institutions have been damaged or destroyed in the conflict, and those still operational often lack basic teaching aids, qualified teachers, and safe learning materials (Connaughton & Berns, 2019). The ongoing conflict disrupts school attendance and forces periodic closures, further exacerbating the educational challenges for boys who lose mobility both geographically and culturally.

Education rates among the youth in Las Anod are generally low, reflecting the disruptive impact of conflict on the education sector. While elementary education is somewhat accessible, secondary and higher education levels present significant challenges for many young people. The conflict has halted education, destroyed infrastructure, and caused large-scale displacement, leading to low enrolment and completion rates. Despite these challenges, the community, along with local and international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), continue to promote education, recognising its urgency for personal and societal development (UNFPA, 2020).

Education, though often interrupted or unavailable, is a critical pathway out of poverty for young people. Job opportunities are scarce, and the persistent violence and uncertainty hinder investment and economic development. This lack of prospects and security leaves many young people with little hope for the future, contributing to economic and social stagnation. The conflict-ridden environment fosters alienation among the youth, depriving them of political and economic inclusion. This exclusion can diminish their hopes or drive them toward a life of crime.

The healthcare system in Las Anod is also affected by the instability in the area. Health centres are mostly under-resourced and do not have the essential resources and staff needed to offer comprehensive healthcare services. The war has made these challenges worse by disturbing the delivery of health services and displacing healthcare workers, and the population they are helping to treat. For young people, this means that they have limited access to prevention and treatment services, which results in long-term negative effects on their well-being and development. Although there is a high level of trauma and mental stress experienced by young people living in a conflict zone, there is also very little or no mental health support. The health issues that the youth face is now complicated by the scarce support services and the absence of safe spaces (Islam et al., 2024).

The youth resort to joining armed groups as a remedy for perpetual poverty, unemployment, fear of victimisation, political marginalisation, or lack of education. The militia groups not only give them a haven to escape but also a false sense of identity, loyalty, and purpose. Receiving regular payment notwithstanding how small it is can remedy precarious life and help the people obtain the food they need; thus, these are some of the go-for factors in a situation of economic instability (Juma & Sabala, 2024).

The added pressure on young men by society to feed their families and provide protection falls in line with economic and security factors as well. The culture of clannism and close identification with clan/subclan groups is among the major factors that pull the youth towards militia groups. The Somali people's society is known for its clan-style leadership, which is highly anchored in patrilineal and cultural backgrounds. Hence, the conflict in Las Anod is further complicated by internal clan dynamics, particularly involving the Dhulbahante clan, which is also known to have resisted Somaliland's territorial demands and is the main homogenised group in the SSC areas, specifically Las Anod. Therefore, the Dhulbahante youth who joined the militia are not only economic fortune-hunters but also exercise their duty to secure the interests of their community and the respect of their clan's honour.

### **Youth as the Perpetrators**

In Las Anod, as in many other conflict-affected areas, youth participation in violence is a complex phenomenon driven by multiple factors. Young people are frequently recruited into militias due to a combination of social vulnerabilities, political manipulation, and direct coercion (Joseph & Maruf, 2018). The lack of economic opportunities, poverty, and



the lure of financial incentives are significant factors, as is the appeal of joining a cause that offers a sense of identity, purpose, and belonging tied to their clan affiliations and personal grievances (UNDP, 2020). Additionally, high unemployment rates and limited educational opportunities leave many young people frustrated and more susceptible to involvement in violent activities.

According to Hoehne (2023), the feeling of insecurity and frustration of many town dwellers with some Somaliland (Isaaq) officials, including the governor of the Sool region, motivated locals, especially the youth, to stage demonstrations in late December 2022 after the assassination of Abdifatah "Hadraawi". These demonstrations continued for several days, but the situation became chaotic when the youth started throwing stones at the Somaliland forces deployed to control the town and the soldiers opened fire injuring and killing several people (mostly young men and women) (Hoehne, 2023). In the conditions of increasing violence, many families left the city and took refuge with relatives in the countryside or went as far as Garowe or Galkayo in Puntland. However, a considerable civilian population (more male than female, more young than old) remained in town, taking up small arms to demonstrate their willingness to defend their homes (Hoehne, 2023).

The youth who joined the militia to fight against the Somaliland military served as soldiers, strategists, and mobilisers even without training, demonstrating their critical role in the operational aspects of the conflict. Some of the youth participated in the conflict as a way to gain respect and status within their communities. In Las Anod the youth are increasingly becoming politically active, supporting the various traditional clan leaders (Garaads), elders, politicians, and intellectuals who promise change or align with their clan interests. According to Ali (2021), the youth utilise and leverage social media and other digital platforms to mobilise support, disseminate propaganda, and organise demonstrations, showcasing their technological savviness and political engagement. The youth also share their accounts of their activities in the war zones using different social media platforms.

In a context where conventional means of success and acceptance have been blocked, holding a gun or territorial control can provide a substantial amount of status and influence. For some young people, joining a local militia or clan group can be viewed as a way of expressing their agency and conviction in their societal position. This becomes even more appealing in a situation where uncountable forms of social and economic improvements are drastically curtailed by ongoing warfare and uncertainty.

### **Youth as the Victims**

Despite being perpetrators in the conflict, young people in Las Anod suffer primarily from the conflict, and they are affected both physically and psychologically. While some are forced to become perpetrators of violence, most are victims who are constantly forced into participation by those who wield authority over them or by the circumstances of the

conflict itself. Young people see and experience actual violence directly, for example, when they lose relatives or their homes and property, which causes deep trauma. Problems like post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression are widespread, and acute mental health care workers fear that these problems are accelerating (Hoehne, 2023).

Just as with any other population segment, youth are both externally and internally displaced. For example, according to Norman (2023), 185,000 people (only from the Dhulbahante population) have been displaced, while numbers from Somaliland are not certain. This has negatively impacted youths in many areas, such as their education, social networks, and sense of community. Living in camps sometimes drifts their livelihoods away from normality, especially due to the lack of basic amenities such as education and healthcare which makes them vulnerable to more impoverishment and dependency. The instability and the absence of basic infrastructure in Las Anod hinder economic activities and job opportunities, thus the rate of unemployment among the youth is very high. Many young people find themselves trapped in the vicious cycle of earning low wages in informal employment with dim prospects of personal development. This economic instability is not only a short-term hindrance to them but also dashes their dreams of the future, often leading them to criminal activities or joining armed groups.

At the same time, the consequences of the conflict are related to gender-specific issues, with young men and women suffering in different ways. Young men are perpetually facing the danger of being recruited to armed groups as soldiers (militias) by force, so they may become involved in violent situations and experience personal trauma. On the other hand, young girls are much more prone to become victims of sexual violence and exploitation. The war situation worsens the existing inequalities between genders, which leads to the elimination of girls' rights to education. Girls are forced into early marriage which harms their personal and educational development (Barakat, 2005).

In a nutshell, it can be observed that many youths are also victims of conflict, facing violence, loss of family members, destruction of property, and displacement, leading to psychological trauma. Additionally, the disruption of education opportunities and access to social services further exacerbates their vulnerability and limits their prospects (UNICEF, 2023). Limited political representation and influence hinder the youths' ability to effect change, while high unemployment rates and economic instability make them vulnerable to exploitation by armed groups. Hence, the ongoing violence and insecurity pose constant threats to the youth's safety and well-being and result in experiences that shape their perspectives and involvement in the conflict.

### **Youth as Peacebuilders**

Although youths in Las Anod are heavily engaged in violent conflict as the perpetrators or the victims, many of them are coherently working for the peace and resilience of their community. Sometimes, the efforts of the youth are a response to emergent challenges

such as loss of jobs, displacement, and community fragmentation brought by armed conflict. Yet, in the face of constant warfare and turmoil, the youth emerge as the most significant actors in grassroots peacebuilding. As young people become aware of the deep divisions that exist in their communities, they implement activities and programs to engage in dialogue and reconciliation. Often, these projects are set in motion by a common ideal for a peaceful and more prosperous future. This is a future that rises above the immediate divisions and grievances that make up the conflict (Zakarie, 2021).

One of the peacebuilding initiatives by young people involves setting up local peace committees composed of young people of various clans and backgrounds to talk about the tensions within the community. These committees are spaces for coordinated interaction between the community members through open conversations. They tackle such issues as land disputation, resource allocation, or the impact of the conflict on day-to-day life. The synthesised mutual understanding by the young people viewing each other as equal peers is the basis for them fostering trust and strengthening relationships, which are prerequisites for a society with higher levels of community bonding and cooperation (APD, 2010).

Moreso, youths have initiated youth-driven conflict resolution workshops and training sessions. These workshops were designed to provide the youth with the skills and knowledge they need to solve disputes calmly and non-violently. The subjects commonly covered are negotiation skills, communication, and characteristics of non-violent resistance. These gatherings, which teach negotiation, communication, and some principles of non-violent resistance, are not limited to boosting their local conflict resolution capacities but also promote peace and nonviolence in the community at large as well.

In addition, young people in Las Anod are also involved in community mobilisation and peace advocacy. They arrange occasions like peace walks, cultural festivals, and sports competitions that bring together participants belonging to different rivalries and foster a feeling of oneness and commonality. It is in these events that people can further discuss and communicate on the inter-group and communal challenges, grow to like each other, and disregard the mistakenly perceived stereotypes that cause the discrepancies that fuel conflict. Young people demonstrate a great deal of moral courage and unity through their involvement in such actions. They are, therefore, showing their aspiration to build a peaceful future.

### **Youth's Community and Political Engagement in Las Anod**

The involvement of the youths in civil society in Las Anod is an example of their engagement with the community. Most young people participate in NGOs and community organizations that provide support on a wide range of issues, including humanitarian, human rights, and governance. Many of these organizations rely on youth who have the

energy, creativity, and local knowledge to help them be successful and interact with the communities.

Youth-led NGOs have emerged as essential service providers and contributors to their peers as well as the wider community in Las Anod. For example, some organisations are primarily engaged in delivering education and vocational training programs. They are the ones responsible for the youth's acquisition of skills needed to start earning a livelihood and, therefore, advance the local economy. Others focus on health agendas, and among the services they render are mental health support, reproductive health education, water provision, and sanitation. These services have produced positive effects on the community's level of life through the efforts of the youth-led NGOs.

There are many examples of young people who have achieved success in civil society because of their dedication to their communities. One of the ways that young people have contributed to improving the situation is by constructing and repairing school facilities. They also are the voices of the marginalised groups in the community and lead the campaign against environmental degradation. These efforts bring tangible effects such as the rise in school enrolment, population awareness of human rights challenges, and overcoming natural resources sustainability issues through their improved management. These are success stories that bring the attention of young people to their talent and set a good example for them to participate and make the necessary changes in their society.

The youth in Las Anod have also changed the local government, as they make significant efforts to participate in the political process. They also demand to be considered more in the process of decision-making and to be voted into political and administrative bodies. Through youth councils and other advisory committees, these youngsters can raise their voices and influence the policies that will later be implemented. Their participation in these governance structures assists the youths in not only gaining power but also making sure that their perspectives and needs are considered in formulating local policies and programs.

Finally, the young people in Las Anod face several challenges in their community and political engagement. Instability and the patriarchal clan-based system constitute a major threat to youth's successful engagement as it is difficult to operate in the absence of peace. The lack of resources and the constraints to monetisation hinder the youth from expanding their activities and achieving their desired outcomes. Another challenge is the reluctance to integrate young people into peace processes. Despite these challenges, youth in Las Anod are determined not to lose their hope for peace. The fact that they can accommodate and are creative in the face of challenges is an undeniable sign of their wish to create a better future. The youth also share their personal stories and strengths on social media making them one of the key players in solving the various problems endangering the community and creating the foundation for a peaceful and prosperous society.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, youths are both crucial actors in perpetuating and resolving the Las Anod conflict. To accomplish their potential to act as agents of peace, meaningful opportunities for participation in economic, political, and social life are necessary. Their nature of being youthful and proficient in digital methods provides hope for the region to move toward a more peaceful and stable future. However, only through their active and sustained contribution can the Las Anod conflict and the wider challenges within Somaliland and Somalia be tackled in the long term.

Youth bear a very critical yet complex role in the conflict of Las Anod, given that they are not only badly affected by the ongoing violence but also contribute to its course and structure. This paper has established that youth involvement in conflict includes multiple roles, where on one side, the youths are perpetrators and victims, and on the other, peacebuilders. Economic and political marginalisation and exclusion and historical and cultural pressures have induced many to join armed groups. However, others have turned themselves into proactive agents of grassroots activism, community building, and peace-making to strive for a more stable and inclusive society.

The other striking feature of the participation of youth in the conflict is the use of social media. Digital spaces have been used for self-expression, mobilisation, propaganda, and calls for peace by the youth in Las Anod. In this war, social media has proven to be a two-edged sword and has also given the youth a powerful tool to incite violence or facilitate peace. The virtual framing of the conflict by Generation Z has given voice to youth influence in ways previously unimaginable, showing that indeed the nature of conflict and peacebuilding is evolving in the digital era.

Moreover, the analysis has shown how important it is to address the very roots of youth involvement in the Las Anod conflict. Economic and political marginalisation and exclusion, and lack of access to education, are critical factors in pushing youth toward militancy. Addressing these issues through focused economic programs, job creation, and educational opportunities would, to a great degree, reduce the participation of youth in violence. Additionally, youths should be given more access to be involved in local governance and decision-making to represent their voices and concerns.

## Recommendations

One significant recommendation is to integrate the youths into the decision-making of the local government as a norm. This could be ensured through the establishment of advisory bodies made up of youth that work together with the local government to ensure that their views, challenges, and needs are included in the policy-making process.

Another recommendation is for the local government to make use of focused economic and educational approaches to fight youth unemployment and alienation from the

mainstream. It is fundamental to channel financial resources into those programs that provide hands-on training specific to jobs available regionally. Such programs should be planned together with the private/business sector to be relevant and up-to-date in skills that are sought in the labour market. Entrepreneurship should also be encouraged, and young people should be offered opportunities through grants, micro-loans, and mentorship programs to start their enterprises. These measures would incentivise economic activity and growth and serve as a counterweight to joining armed groups. It is also important that local authorities and NGOs establish community centres that are safe for the youths to use as a space for training, cultural, and recreational activities that encourage peaceful coexistence.

Finally, there is a need to examine the role of technology and digital platforms (social media) in youth mobilisation, virtual framing of conflict, and peacebuilding. This is because the youths in Las Anod use social media and digital tools to interact, participate in the conflict, coordinate, and advocate for peace. Therefore, knowing the potential and limitations of such tools in the context of the conflict in Las Anod is essential to understanding how technology can be utilized to harness the agency of the youth in peacebuilding.

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