

Beyond 2020

Exploring the potential for a stronger UN-AU peacebuilding partnership

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Effective and sustainable multilateral peace and security initiatives in Africa depend on a strong partnership between the United Nations and the African Union. While their strategic partnership has grown since 2017, collective peacebuilding efforts still lag behind cooperation in other areas. Different institutional mandates, policy frameworks and operational practices have led them to carve out distinct roles in the multilateral peacebuilding space, often impeding closer cooperation. This report analyses these dynamics and identifies opportunities for a more robust and effective partnership.

Key findings

- ▶ Despite significant advances in the UN-AU partnership, cooperation on peacebuilding lags behind areas such as multilateral peace operations, mediation and crisis management. The organisations have yet to harmonise adequately certain conceptual differences, despite closer peacebuilding cooperation being envisioned in various organisational policies.
- ▶ Inter-institutional cooperation has been limited as a result of imbalanced in-country operational capacities, coupled with a lack of alignment between comparative strengths and substantive priorities.
- ▶ Member-state bodies are responsible for aligning common peacebuilding objectives with political strategies in the two organisations. While the AU Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) and the UN Peacebuilding Commission (UNPBC) are growing focal points for dialogue, there is a clear need for a more consistent and unified African voice on peacebuilding in both Addis Ababa and New York.
- ▶ A more meaningful peacebuilding partnership should leverage each organisation's strengths and complement their limitations. New approaches within both organisations indicate an emerging shift toward this position. These approaches include common elements such as more nimble, flexible and context-specific interventions and more sustained cooperation outside of traditional post-conflict settings.
- ▶ The 2020 review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, alongside ongoing structural reform processes within the AU Commission, should be seen as a key window of opportunity for fostering more closely aligned political strategies for a shared UN-AU peacebuilding agenda.

Recommendations

For UN and AU member states:

- ▶ UN and AU member states should build consensus around shared peacebuilding concerns, including through the AU PSC, the UN Security Council and the UNPBC. They should look at better leveraging each organisation's legitimacy and complementarity.
- ▶ The AU PSC should better institutionalise a working relationship with the African Peacebuilding Caucus of the UN's Africa Group. Members of the AU PSC should prioritise using the council's statutory sub-committee on post-conflict reconstruction and development.
- ▶ The AU PSC and UNPBC should strengthen implementation of the recommendations from the 2018 annual meeting in order to improve working methods.

For UN and AU officials:

- ▶ Annual peace and security engagements between UN and AU officials should include peacebuilding and development counterparts from both headquarters and field deployments.
- ▶ The UN PBSO and the UN Development Coordination Office should explore opportunities to conduct joint analysis and planning exercises for peacebuilding activities with AU and regional economic community counterparts.
- ▶ The AU PCRDR Interdepartmental Task Force should strive to build working relationships with the UN DCO and the UN's regional peace and development advisors to share analysis and offer targeted expertise. Greater efforts could also be made to strengthen coherence with the Joint Task Force on Peace and Security.

Introduction

Effective multilateral solutions to African peace and security challenges depend on a strong United Nations (UN)-African Union (AU) partnership, given that neither organisation can address the magnitude or complexities of such challenges if it works in isolation.

Both organisations emphasise the importance of helping countries build inclusive societies, preventing and mitigating armed conflict and making the transition from periods of crisis to sustainable development. Current global political dynamics and budgetary pressures are, however, making a reliance on peacekeeping and peace support operations less sustainable.

These developments are unfolding alongside emerging shifts toward long-term peacebuilding efforts characterised by a greater focus on locally-driven and context-specific approaches.¹ Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has added immense humanitarian, social and economic stresses to an already complex multilateral peacebuilding environment.²

Effective peacebuilding requires coherent and shared political strategies among a wide range of partners

UN and AU cooperation over peacekeeping and peace support operations has received significant political attention³ and other shared priorities, such as mediation and crisis management, have grown increasingly important in recent years.⁴

Cooperation over longer-term peacebuilding priorities and engagements has, however, lagged significantly behind these other areas and remains the weakest link in the UN-AU strategic partnership. Their respective institutional peacebuilding architectures reflect clear differences in how each organisation approaches peacebuilding at policy and operational levels. These distinctions are particularly apparent in relation to in-country programming and peacebuilding financing, which reveal broad conceptual and material divergences between the two organisations.

Nonetheless, there are clear opportunities to improve coordination and build a more impactful partnership.

Effective peacebuilding requires coherent and shared political strategies among a wide range of partners that support complex national processes. A stronger UN-AU partnership could thus help frame these shared challenges and, in turn, generate the political and operational solutions required to address common problems. Recent shifts towards more flexible, nimble and context-tailored interventions are encouraging, and point to opportunities for greater joint analysis and coordinated peacebuilding engagements.

Significant policy processes unfolding throughout 2020 in both the UN and the AU also provide key opportunities to examine the peacebuilding partnership critically. Specifically, the 2020 review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) and the ongoing structural reform processes within the AU Commission could well have an impact on how peacebuilding is situated, conceptually understood and collectively put into operation by the two organisations.⁵

In particular, the merger of the AU Commission's Department of Political Affairs and the Peace and Security Department may enhance synergies between broader or cross-cutting issues including political dialogue, governance and human rights, with post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD) – and peacebuilding-focused policies and programming.

This research report accordingly documents and explores potential ways to strengthen the UN-AU peacebuilding partnership and how the two organisations' peacebuilding agendas could be better harmonised and jointly put into operation. It argues that an array of political, conceptual, institutional and financial challenges hinders the partnership from realising its full potential, and identifies opportunities to establish closer ties that align with the comparative strengths and limitations of the two organisations.

The paper is based on an extensive literature survey as well as 25 anonymous interviews with officials from the UN and AU systems, member states and relevant peacebuilding researchers and practitioners from think tanks, civil society and academia.

Finding common ground

The peacebuilding architectures of the UN and the AU emerged between 2005 and 2006 out of a common

understanding of the imperative to sustain fragile peace efforts and support countries moving away from sustained conflict.⁶

Both organisations acknowledged the critical importance of dedicating greater political attention to responding to these specific transitional and post-conflict situations. However, differences between their institutional mandates, coupled with differing influences from member states and operational constraints, shaped how each architecture (and its underlying conceptual agenda) has since evolved.

These architectures emerged within a rapidly changing international peacebuilding space. In the past decade there has been a clear shift in peacebuilding practices from top-down, linear and externally-driven interventions to those that recognise and support the complex systems of local actors and institutions that are ultimately responsible for sustainable peacebuilding.⁷

Situating national ownership at the centre of effective peacebuilding requires engagement with diverse sets of local processes and identifying the various ways in which sub-regional, regional and international multilateral interventions can contribute positively to these local efforts.⁸

International actors thus need to leverage their own particular abilities in responding to different peacebuilding contexts, while also being acutely aware of their political and operational limitations. Accordingly, it has been recognised that effective inter-institutional partnerships aligned around shared goals and joint analyses can help leverage comparative advantages, while further minimising each actor's limitations.

The UN's peacebuilding architecture is currently underpinned by the Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace approach, which was articulated in the 2015 Peacebuilding Architecture review and endorsed through 'twin' resolutions by the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council in 2016.⁹

This approach defines sustaining peace as both a goal and a process and contextualises UN peacebuilding engagement across the entire conflict spectrum (from prevention-oriented efforts to post-conflict recovery).¹⁰ It marks a decisive shift from the first ten years of UN peacebuilding efforts, which had been oriented toward

post-conflict settings and were characterised as 'under-prioritised, under-resourced and undertaken only after the guns fall silent'.¹¹

The architecture itself comprises three different entities: the UNPBC, an inter-governmental body comprising 31 member states that advises the UNSC and the UN Economic and Social Council; the Secretary General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), a financial instrument that invests in UN and non-UN-led peacebuilding programmes, and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), a small office within the UN's Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), which assists these entities and promotes system-wide policy coherence.

The AU's peacebuilding architecture is anchored in its post-conflict reconstruction and development framework

Given the PBSO's administrative functions and central coordination role it is effectively seen as the unofficial PBA Secretariat. While these entities constitute the formal peacebuilding architecture, in practice UN agencies, funds and programmes also play prominent roles in implementing peacebuilding initiatives. UN peacekeeping operations and political missions also carry out peacebuilding tasks directly (albeit on a comparatively smaller scale).

The AU's peacebuilding architecture is anchored in its post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD) framework, which was endorsed by the union's member states in 2006. The policy was designed to assist countries emerging from conflict to consolidate peace, prevent conflict relapses, address the root causes of conflict and promote socio-economic development.¹²

PCRD interventions are recognised as cross-cutting efforts that span short-, medium- and long-term time horizons. The AU PSC is delegated by the AU Assembly to oversee PCRD efforts.¹³ The policy also designates the continent's regional economic communities (RECs) as 'regional focal points for PCRD' and mandates them to play coordination and harmonisation roles.¹⁴

Day-to-day policy work on AU peacebuilding is spearheaded by the Crisis Management and PCRD

Division (CMPCRD) within the AU's Peace and Security Department. The division draws upon other entities within the PSD and the AU Commission to provide substantive support for its work.

For example, the AU Continental Early Warning System helps CMPCRD monitor trends in post-conflict settings; the Defence and Security Division of the AU PSD leads on the rule of law and security aspects of peacebuilding; the Department of Political Affairs advises on governance-related support and the AU Women, Gender and Development Directorate provides inputs on gender peace and security issues.

These entities are coordinated by a commission-wide inter-departmental task force on PCRDR. The architecture also relies on 11 AU liaison offices (AULOs) – in-country focal points for political and peacebuilding work, as well as the newly established AU Centre for PCRDR (AUCPCRDR), and the African Solidarity Initiative (ASI).¹⁵

Table 1 gives a brief summary of the key conceptual and operational aspects of the UN's and AU's current

overarching approaches to peacebuilding, as anchored within the UN's Sustaining Peace approach, and the AU's PCRDR Framework.

The UN's sustaining peace approach and the AU PCRDR policy framework reflect varying degrees of coherence

Policy documents from both organisations explicitly acknowledge the importance of the UN-AU partnership to peacebuilding. The 2017 Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security lists one of its four essential themes as 'Addressing Root Causes' in the context of sustainable peace and continued development. It also calls for the two organisations to: integrate peacebuilding strategies into all areas of cooperation, strengthen coordination and cooperation on peacebuilding and work in support of the full implementation of the AU PCRDR Framework.¹⁶

Table 1: Conceptual and operational aspects of the UN's and AU's current overarching approaches to peacebuilding

UN SUSTAINING PEACE APPROACH	AU PCRDR FRAMEWORK
Focus: The agenda contextualises UN peacebuilding engagement <i>across the entire conflict spectrum</i>	Focus: The framework is a comprehensive set of measures that seeks to address the needs of countries <i>emerging from conflict</i>
Applications: The agenda follows a whole-of-system approach that includes conflict prevention, assisting parties to conflicts to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation and working towards recovery, reconstruction and development. It defines sustaining peace as a goal and a process	Applications: The policy works to prevent the resurgence of conflict, address the root causes of conflict and focus on socio-economic development as a path to sustainable peace
Broad priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political processes • Safety and security • Rule of law and human rights • Social services • Core government functions • Economic revitalisation, including employment, livelihoods and infrastructure 	Broad priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic reconstruction and development • Security • Humanitarian/ emergency assistance • Political governance and transition • Human rights, justice and reconciliation • Women and gender

Source: The authors

The sustaining peace resolutions, alongside two UNSC presidential statements, emphasise the importance of a closer peacebuilding partnership at political and operational levels. The AU's PCRD framework also acknowledges the role of international actors like the UN, and the AU's 2018 Results Based Framework (RBF) for PCRD details opportunities for closer UN-AU cooperation.¹⁷

Similarly, the AU's Master Roadmap for Implementing the Silencing the Guns Agenda by 2020 details how the AU Commission, the AU PSC and the UN Secretariat can collectively 'strengthen institutional capacity to undertake post-conflict stabilisation, peacebuilding and reconstruction'.¹⁸ Encouragingly, these two documents illustrate the AU's ongoing commitment to putting its PCRD policy into operation, and stands alongside the UN's continued efforts to put the sustaining peace agenda into practice.¹⁹

These policy frameworks and institutional structures have further informed the evolution of each organisation's approach to peacebuilding and how they articulate their comparative strengths. The UN's global membership, for example, bolsters the potential role of and support for the PBC with PBF investments, backed by widespread UN in-country operations – which orient much of the UN's programming work.

The AU maintains clear institutional strengths relating to its continental mandate and political legitimacy, which provide the organisation with more direct influence and engagement with national and sub-regional actors.

The AU Commission's efforts are further complemented by its liaison offices, which, in some instances, coordinate and put into operation PCRD-focused programming. However, the AULOs are political deployments first and foremost and are not directly comparable with the UN's country teams, which have different mandates, resources and institutional structures.

The UN's sustaining-peace agenda and the AU PCRD policy framework reflect varying degrees of coherence and can therefore be compared more directly. Both agendas are rooted in common principles relating to inclusivity, national ownership, sustainability and coherence. Moreover, both frameworks consider peacebuilding as a fundamentally political exercise

underpinned by common goals focused on addressing the root causes of conflict, reducing the potential for violence and consolidating peace through sustainable development.²⁰

Similarly, they approach peacebuilding processes (whether through political engagement, financial investment or technical advice) as cross-cutting exercises that require holistic approaches to politics and governance, economics, security, development, gender, human rights and justice.

[The UN and AU's] policies on peacebuilding are not universally understood or accepted by the respective member states

Accordingly, there is often cooperation and alignment between these frameworks at both the strategic level – when member states in both organisations discuss common concerns through inter-institutional engagements – and, to a lesser extent, through in-country operational cooperation in countries like Somalia and the Gambia.

However, some differences in their conceptual approaches do stand in the way of a closer UN-AU partnership – and their policies on peacebuilding are not universally understood or accepted by their respective member states.

Despite the endorsement of the twin 2016 resolutions, UN member states have often struggled to articulate the tangible application of the sustaining-peace approach.²¹ The AU Commission has developed detailed technical guidance on PCRD implementation for a diverse range of stakeholders and complemented these with further details in a Results Based Framework and in the Silencing the Guns Master Roadmap.²² However, AU member states do not yet share a common understanding of PCRD objectives and instruments, resulting in slowed implementation.

Different peacebuilding terminology also exacerbates efforts to find common ground. Although the organisations share broad goals, terminology is important as it helps define when and where member states believe peacebuilding interventions should take place and how they should be implemented. This leads to confusion

and undermines the potential to explore new areas of collaboration. As one independent expert explained:

it's definitely an issue of language and terminology, this can be an endless debate. You often have to explain to [UN officials] that PCRDR is the AU's peacebuilding arm, much like similar efforts to try and bring the UN's sustaining-peace language into [the AU].²³

The UN sustaining-peace agenda's emphasis on a conflict spectrum approach is a particular point of contrast. By linking conflict prevention to peacebuilding, the UN peacebuilding architecture is, at least in theory, able to draw on different institutional mechanisms, resources and approaches to engage in a given country.²⁴ In comparison, AU member states have tended to situate PCRDR as a post-conflict exercise that divorces PCRDR-oriented engagement from the AU's other conflict- prevention work.²⁵

More recently, however, the AU's PCRDR efforts have started to branch out and focus on a more diverse set of conflict situations, better linking its approach to prevention and stabilisation at both a conceptual and operational level. This can be seen in terms of stabilisation-oriented interventions in Somalia, the Central African Republic and the Lake Chad Basin and a growing focus on countries undergoing political transition, such as Sudan or the Gambia.²⁶

There have also been a number of cases in which both organisations aim for largely similar goals but are not necessarily aligned in terms of language or overarching strategies.²⁷

Terminology is important as it helps define when and where peacebuilding interventions should take place and how they should be implemented

Finally, disparities in operational capacity affect the way each organisation perceives the other's potential value to peacebuilding efforts. Several UN officials indicated that they do not perceive the AU as having a comparative advantage in peacebuilding because the organisation does not have significant in-country programming operations.²⁸

While both organisations depend on mobilising extra-budgetary funding for peacebuilding initiatives, the recent growth of the PBF and its ability to draw on a broader base of potential funders creates additional distance between the two organisations.

The multitude of UN entities working on peacebuilding at policy and operational levels also complicates the partnership. Although coordination between the UN peacebuilding architecture and the UN Development System was improved by the 2019 reform process, coherence amongst these entities (and between them and their AU counterparts) remains a work in progress. Consequently, these perceptions privilege a UN-AU

PBF FUNDING SUPPORTED
PROJECTS IN

27

African
countries

BETWEEN 2017–2019

peacebuilding partnership at a strategic level, but not necessarily at an operational level.²⁹

Opportunities to strengthen the partnership

There is ample scope for more meaningful cooperation between the two organisations, which could be strengthened by partnership structures that include the Joint Task Force, annual ‘desk-to-desk’ meetings, the Annual Conference and standing engagements between the UNSC, the AU PSC and the UNPBC.³⁰

All these remain critical ways of identifying, advancing and coordinating collaboration over common peacebuilding priorities. Moreover, the AU’s Partnership Management and Coordination Division, situated within the office of the deputy chairperson of the commission, remains another key inter-institutional node that could effect more meaningful cooperation.

However, realising the full potential of the partnership requires the organisations to overcome political and operational challenges. This section assesses various dimensions of collaboration, focusing, in particular, on aligned and coherent political strategies, member state dynamics, common operational and programming issues and financing. Emergent and novel peacebuilding approaches are also discussed in terms of the potential opportunities these provide for enhancing cooperation.

Pursuing aligned and coherent political strategies

Both the UN and the AU readily acknowledge that peacebuilding and PCRDR are, first and foremost, political exercises. Accordingly, aligned and coherent political strategies are necessary to provide a political backstop for stability as national actors articulate and advance their own peacebuilding efforts.

Placing politics at the centre of a more partnership-oriented approach requires the two organisations to assess more directly the complementarity and value of their respective political roles in specific country or regional settings.³¹ A more politically focused approach to cooperation can be broadly understood across four key areas.

Firstly, there should be a shared appreciation of peacebuilding challenges and priorities in country or regional settings. While the peacebuilding agendas of member states in these multilateral bodies may have

become more closely aligned, there are gaps in the way overarching political priorities are identified and translated at the operational level.

Consensus over relevant country and thematic priorities would mark an important point of departure for closer cooperation. This should also include consistent analyses of how UN and AU member states understand various risks to peace in these contexts, how they prioritise and sequence interventions and which national actors or international partners are best positioned to engage with them.

Realising the full potential of the partnership requires the organisations to overcome political and operational challenges

Some of these issues are increasingly being explored within the portfolios of the UNPBC and the AU PSC, including through the UNPBC’s country-specific discussions and the countries in which the AU PSC has mandated an AULO.³² Importantly, the UNPBC’s increasing focus on issues outside of the country-configuration structure enables it to engage on issues (such as the Lake Chad Basin region) that may be on the AU PSC agenda, but may not necessarily be on the agenda of the UNSC.³³ Specifically, greater overlap of discussions could help identify shared priorities and collective efforts to support national stakeholders.

Secondly, legitimacy must be viewed as a key entry point for joint UN-AU political engagement in country settings. Officials from the AU and the UN, member states and independent experts alike emphasised that the AU’s comparative legitimacy as an African institution allows it to engage with the necessary degree of credibility in conflict-affected states on the continent.

The triangular relationship among the UN, the AU and the RECs is also particularly significant insofar as credible and legitimate UN-AU peacebuilding engagements are concerned.³⁴

The AU’s role in support of the Central African Republic’s peace process is emblematic of the importance of this

relationship. Through its leading role in facilitating the 2019 peace process, its recent deployment of military observers and ongoing support for stabilisation and development initiatives like the National Recovery and Peace-Building Plan (RCPCA) 2017–2021, the AU has helped create an environment for consistent engagement with the UN (through the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic – MINUSCA) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).³⁵

Thirdly, inclusivity and national ownership should be prioritised as foundational principles for more aligned and coherent UN-AU political strategies for peacebuilding. The AU's mandate, comparative legitimacy and frequent interactions with the RECs enable it to engage member state governments and political parties more readily.

In comparison, the UN system's more elaborate in-country operations – whether through a peacekeeping operation, special political mission, or country team – enable the organisation, in principle, to build closer ties with local institutions, community organisations and vulnerable populations.

The AU's greater legitimacy and the UN's closer proximity to local actors do not, however, necessarily confer or strengthen national ownership over peacebuilding processes, many other factors drive the interests and agendas of local, national and external actors.

Aligned and coherent political strategies provide a backstop for stability as national actors advance their own peacebuilding efforts

These factors could, however, be better accounted for through complementary strategies that aim to assist UN and AU stakeholders to identify priorities for peacebuilding and development frameworks. Collaboration between the AU and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in supporting the implementation of the Lake Chad Basin's regional stabilisation strategy indicates the effectiveness of such approaches, which place a premium on national ownership.³⁶

Specifically, whereas the AU and the Lake Chad Basin Commission worked closely with government parties to develop and ratify the strategy, the UNDP has tried to inform local communities across the region about the accompanying Regional Stabilization Fund. While the clear division of labour among the three has been encouraging, there have been a number of operational challenges relating to coherent and complementary engagements with local actors.

Lastly, growing acknowledgment of the intra-regional and cross-border dimensions of peacebuilding offers valuable opportunities for the UN and AU to align their political strategies. The UNPBC and the PBF are increasingly

6
out of
30

COUNTRIES ON THE PBC
IN 2020 ARE AFRICAN
MEMBER STATES

moving towards the approach of the AU's PCRD framework, which prioritises regional engagement.³⁷

These shifts reflect a growing acknowledgement of the transnational nature of peacebuilding challenges and the consequent need to redefine and adapt strategies and programming. This can be seen, for example, in efforts to align the AU's 2014 regional strategy for the Sahel and the UN's Integrated Strategy for the Sahel in order to foster closer inter-institutional cooperation and agreement on regional development priorities.³⁸

Such strategies also benefit greatly from closer cooperation with RECs, which can help UN and AU stakeholders identify entry points for dialogue and potentially reduce transaction costs.³⁹

Aligning political strategies for peacebuilding can be particularly challenging, however, for two key reasons. Firstly, the UN and AU must navigate the multitude of different and often competing political interests of member states and different institutional organs and agencies.⁴⁰

Secondly, neither the AU PSC nor the UNPBC, the two member-state bodies with specific mandates for peacebuilding engagements, has complete ownership over political outcomes as these are further dependent on the authority and decision-making powers of other UN and AU organs, particularly the UNSC, the AU Assembly, and the AU Executive Council.⁴¹

Member state bodies as drivers

Member state cooperation over peacebuilding is necessary to ensure common strategies between the two organisations. While cooperation between the UNSC and the AU PSC is often seen as the partnership's political apex, the UNPBC is a more natural counterpart to the AU PSC for discussing peacebuilding-specific priorities and supporting national stakeholders. How these bodies navigate their respective internal dynamics, and how they relate to one another, has an impact on the trajectory of collective peacebuilding efforts.

While the AU PSC focuses explicitly on all peace and security issues, it has not fully embraced the PCRD aspects of its mandate. This challenge is epitomised by AU member states' reluctance to support a standing committee on PCRD, or various country-specific ministerial committees, as required by the 2006 PCRD

Framework.⁴² PCRD conversations within the AU PSC are described as comparatively 'easy' subjects that remain largely rhetorical, and there is insufficient pressure for decisions to be implemented.

The PSC's broad peace and security mandate, when contrasted with the UN PBC's much narrower focus, further leads to an imbalance in the way peacebuilding is approached by the two organisations and how collective inter-institutional peacebuilding strategies may be identified and implemented.

The UN and AU must navigate the multitude of different political interests of member states, organs and agencies

The UNPBC has recently begun to reorient its approach to peacebuilding. PBC country-specific configurations were initially the body's dominant form of engagement with African countries, but were mired in perceptions of being a client-oriented relationship.⁴³ The UNPBC has since refined its working methods to focus on more regional and thematic issues and provide support to countries not on the agenda of the UNSC.⁴⁴

In spite of this, however, the UNPBC still faces significant challenges in coordinating effective peacebuilding engagements. While UNPBC country configurations have often provided effective coordination platforms for bilateral and multilateral partners, they have struggled to exert adequate influence in a number of countries, Liberia, Burundi and the Central African Republic being recent examples.⁴⁵ Thus, whereas the AU PSC and UNPBC could be viewed as promising UN-AU parallel structures to strengthen joint peacebuilding efforts, both bodies are similarly limited in what they can practically achieve, albeit for different reasons.

While dynamics between the UNSC and the UNPBC do not lend themselves well to direct comparisons, there are some lessons for African member states on the UNPBC. Specifically, the three African members of the UNSC (A3) offer a potential model for improved coherence among the African grouping on the UNPBC.

Given the increasing role and influence of the A3 in driving common continental positions (often, but

not always, stemming from the AU PSC),⁴⁶ closer cooperation among African members on the UNPBC could similarly amplify African interests within the body. However, this may prove challenging given that the UNPBC's more complex membership pool does not lend itself as easily to the formation of a coherent political identity or common agenda.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, the UN General Assembly's Africa Group and the AU Permanent Observer Mission to the UN convene meetings of the African Peacebuilding Caucus, which does have an informal mandate to discuss African peacebuilding priorities.⁴⁸

Their discussions generally concern issues relating to African PBC members, countries that have previously featured on the agenda of the PBC and the PBF, and issues confronting the countries that are discussed in PBC country-specific-configurations. These meetings could help consolidate African inputs into the current UNPBA review (set to be endorsed by the AUPSC in September 2020),⁴⁹ and could potentially evolve into a more structured interface between Addis Ababa and New York, akin to the gradual evolution of the role of the A3 as a bridge between the UNSC and the AU PSC.

The annual meeting of the UNPBC and AU PSC offer a promising, but nascent, entry point for closer collaboration. While informal interactions between the chair of the PBC and members of the AU PSC go back to 2014, momentum for an institutionalised process picked up following a PBC delegation's visit to Addis Ababa in 2016 on the margins of the AU PCRD Framework's 10th anniversary workshop.⁵⁰

The increasing use of online video teleconferencing, due to COVID-19, could lead to novel solutions

This consultation was spearheaded by two member states: Kenya (in its formal capacity as Chair of the UNPBC in 2016 and a member of the AU PSC) and Egypt (in an informal capacity as a member of AU PSC and an elected member of the UNSC) and proved useful in driving through greater inter-institutional coordination.

Numerous interviewees pointed to this period as a key example of how African member states could best utilise

their membership of these multilateral bodies to facilitate meaningful engagements and streamline logistical arrangements between the UN and the AU.

Two years later all the members of both bodies met for the first time in New York on the sidelines of the annual UNSC-AU PSC session. This consultation produced the most detailed set of suggestions for strengthening cooperation at the member state level, as outlined in Table 2.

The UNPBC-AU PSC dialogue currently resembles, to some extent, the early stages of the UNSC-AU PSC annual consultations in terms of the ongoing formalisation and refinement of planning and logistical processes, as well as both parties still working toward an optimal meeting structure.⁵¹ In addition, some participants highlighted the value of these meetings in affording the two bodies the opportunity to build a direct relationship and share assessments of and priorities in relation to country and regional situations. The inclusion of PBC country-configuration member states in these meetings is also a positive innovation, supporting closer coordination among African member states.

Certain UN officials who have supported these discussions tempered this optimism, however, by pointing to the various obstacles that inhibit them from concrete action. As there are more than twice as many UN PBC members as UNSC members it becomes logistically difficult (if not impossible) for the entire body to travel for consultations in Addis Ababa, thus privileging meetings that take place in New York.

However, the increasing use and advancement of online video teleconferencing, necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to novel solutions that do not solely depend on physical meetings. Since the imposition of pandemic-response measures the UNPBC has consistently conducted virtual consultations and has invited AU officials based in New York and in Addis Ababa.

Individuals who have participated in these processes also characterised the discussions as light on substance, saying the rhetorical commitments do not translate into tangible action.

The two bodies have implemented a few of the suggestions made during the 2018 meeting, which

Table 2: Opportunities identified by UNPBC and AU PSC for stronger collaboration

The UN-AU partnership must explore ways to enable more frequent formal and informal communication. This should be achieved at all levels (e.g., ambassadorial, and working level), using innovative tools, including more regular VTCs.
Institutionalisation of regular PBC-PSC interactions by means of annual meetings between the two entities, alternating between New York and Addis Ababa.
The PBC could convene a meeting solely dedicated to further exploring ways to strengthen PBC-PSC collaboration and engagement.
The joint platform could coordinate and advocate for greater resources to be directed toward peacebuilding issues, including for the PBF. This joint platform could also be used to share and apply lessons learned and good practices.
Noting that the Security Council does not focus continuously on the situation in one particular country, the flexibility of the PBC would allow it to play a complementary role, undertaking broader activities, such as identifying and analysing the root causes of conflict through joint assessments and analysis, mobilising resources and convening relevant actors, including from the country under consideration.
The UN-AU joint analysis of the root causes of conflict requires regular follow-up action and mechanisms to monitor whether recommended courses of action are implemented and evaluate whether strategies/action points should be readjusted.
The PBSO was invited to become a partner of the new Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Centre (once it became operational) in Cairo, Egypt and to provide resources and expertise on developing concepts and processes.
In light of the AU's revision of the PCRDR policies and the UN's revision of the peacebuilding architecture, the two frameworks should be mapped and synergised to better understand each other's work.

Source: African Union and United Nations, AU Peace and Security Council and UN Peacebuilding Commission Interactive Dialogue, 18 July 2018⁵²

notably include: the formalisation of the annual consultation, that the UN PBC should focus more regional issues and that the AU has requested UN support for the AU Centre for PCRDR. However, the items raised in 2018 did not feature prominently in the 2019 AU PSC press statement following the annual PBC interaction, suggesting that cooperation is still largely limited to rhetoric.⁵³

Reconciling approaches

Despite the overlap of UN and AU policy frameworks, the organisations put their peacebuilding agendas into practice in very different ways, both in their headquarters and in in-country settings. Operational and working-level interactions between stakeholders of the two bodies have, to date, been underwhelming, in spite of frequent calls for greater coordination.

In his remarks to the UN PBC in November 2019, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security Smail Chergui characterised cooperation among the AU's CMPCRDR, the PBSO and the PBF as limited, and invited the parties to 'undertake technical working visits to the Commission's headquarters in Addis Ababa to gain a deeper understanding of [the AU's] working methods and thus gain an improved understanding of the dynamics, limitations, and challenges of the Commission.'⁵⁴

This lack of regular inter-institutional peacebuilding engagement at the operational level is particularly noticeable in relation to the provisions of a three-year AU Commission and UN PBSO memorandum of understanding on peacebuilding, which sought to facilitate closer cooperation and lay the groundwork for joint initiatives.⁵⁵

There are a number of reasons for these challenges. The provisions of the 2017 memorandum reflected, in many ways, existing provisions in the 2017 UN-AU partnership framework agreement and lacked the necessary links to other parts of the UN's peacebuilding machinery, such as the Development Coordination Office (DCO).

One of these relates to the imbalance between the two organisations in relation to operational capacity at both headquarters level and in different country settings. As a result, the UN has an unintended and implicit focus on peacebuilding programming as the core objective of its work. These efforts are largely driven by country-level programmes, which often do not include frequent collaboration with AU stakeholders.

UN peacebuilding efforts are commonly overseen and implemented in countries by UN agencies, funds and programmes. While the PBF deploys a limited number of staff in a country to coordinate its investments, UN Country Teams are often the most prominent peacebuilding actors in any given country and UN peace operations are slowly incorporating small peacebuilding projects that align with their mission mandates.⁵⁶

Underpinned by the PBSO's coordination and policy role within the UN Secretariat and its growing partnership with the UN DCO, the UN system has a wide latitude to implement peacebuilding programming in many countries.

AU PCRDR efforts are overseen by headquarters staff in Addis Ababa as well as by a presence in various countries. The AU Crisis Management and Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Division (CMPCRDR) oversees PCRDR policy development, the deployment of technical assessment missions and quick impact projects, and backstops the 11 AULOs that are currently in operation.⁵⁷

Working-level interactions between the two bodies have, to date, been underwhelming, in spite of frequent calls for greater coordination

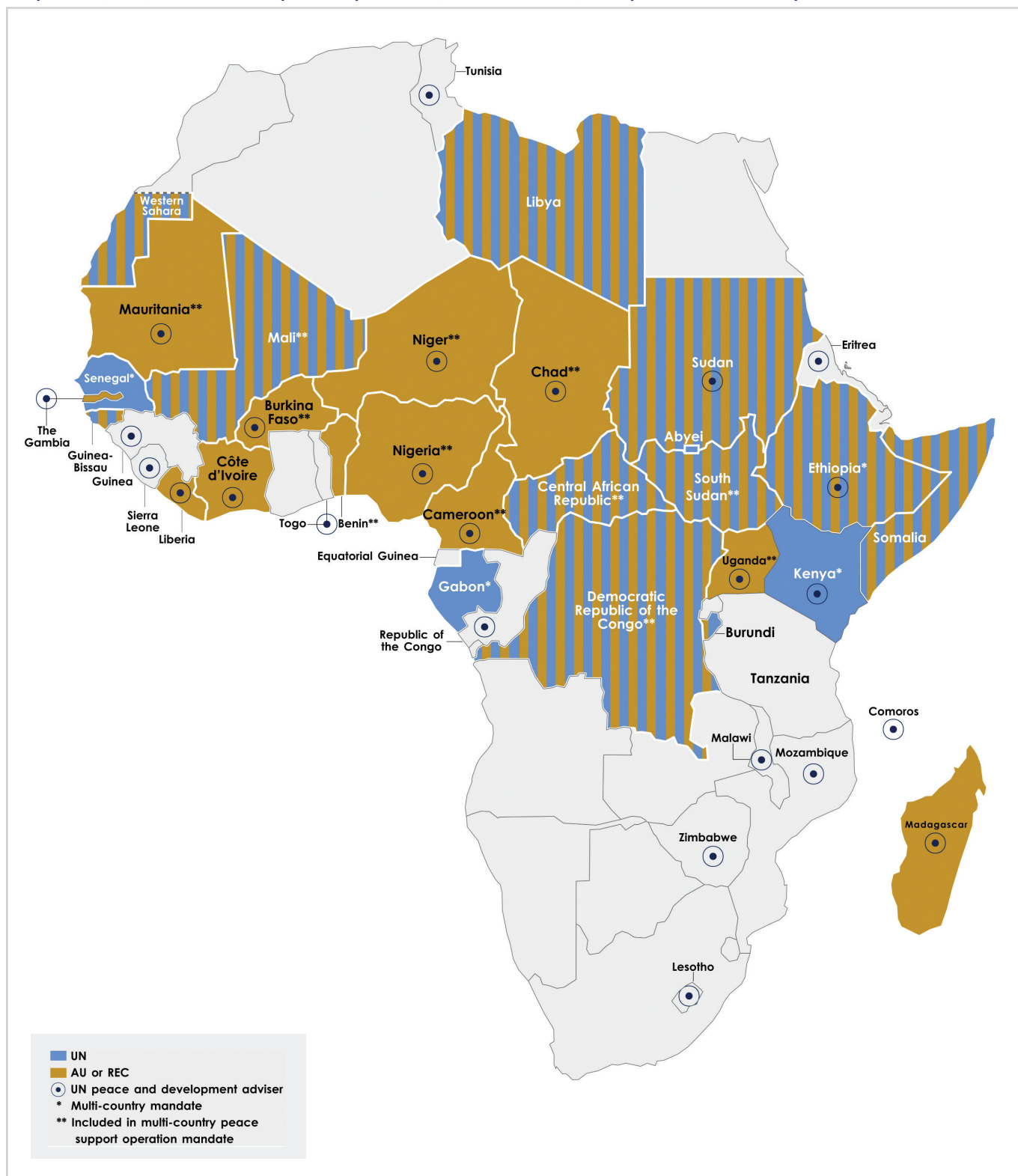
Substantive work on PCRDR issues is spread across different divisions within the AU's PSD and across the broader AU Commission, necessitating the involvement of the interdepartmental working group.⁵⁸

AULOs direct the AU's peace and security work in country settings, including through direct support to peacebuilding and PCRDR initiatives. They are most frequently deployed to countries where the AU supports the facilitation of a peace process or implementation of an agreement. Accordingly, they are not directly comparable to the UNCTs in terms of mandate as they are primarily focused on the political dimension of PCRDR work.⁵⁹

The AU can also bring in agencies and organs situated outside Addis Ababa that can contribute to the broader peacebuilding discussion and therefore offer new entry points to forge a stronger partnership with the UN.

THERE ARE
11
AU Liaison
Offices
CURRENTLY IN OPERATION
ACROSS THE CONTINENT

Map 1: UN, AU, and REC/RM peace operations, liaison offices, and peace and development advisers



Source: AU Commission, African Union Handbook 2019, pp. 82–86; DPPA, '2018 Map of UN-AU Partnership in Peace and Security,' July 19, 2018, available at https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/180717_un-au_partnership_2018_map_final.pdf; DPPA, 'Peace and Development Advisers: Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention,' available at <https://dppa.un.org/en/peace-and-development-advisors-joint-undp-dppa-programme-building-national-capacities-conflict>. This map was first published in D Forti and P Singh, *Toward a More Effective UN-AU Partnership on Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management*, International Peace Institute and Institute for Security Studies, October 2019, www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1910_UN-AU_Partnership-1.pdf

Note: The AU Liaison Office in Liberia was officially closed in 2020, and is incorrectly shaded on this map.

- UN peacekeeping operation
- UN special political mission
- ▶ UN envoy or adviser
- UN country team or peace and development adviser

- AU or REC peace support operation
- AU or REC mission or liaison office
- ▷ AU or REC envoy, representative, or mediator

- * Multi-country mandate
- ** Multi-country peace support operation mandate

Burundi

- ▶ UN special envoy in Burundi
 - AU human rights observers and military experts in Burundi
- AU Liaison Office in Burundi
 - ▷ East African Community (EAC) mediator and facilitator of the Inter-Burundian Dialogue

Central African Republic (CAR)

- UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA)
- AU Mission for CAR and Central Africa (MISAC)*
- Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) special representative

Chad

- Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram** (Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria)
- AU Liaison Office in Chad

Côte d'Ivoire

- AU Liaison Office in Côte d'Ivoire

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

- UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO)
- AU Liaison Office in the DRC
- ▷ AU Facilitator of the National Dialogue in the DRC

Ethiopia

- UN Office to the AU (UNOAU)
- ▶ UN Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa
- ▷ AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) for Sudan and South Sudan*

Gabon

- UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA)* (Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, DRC, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe)

The Gambia

- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Military Intervention in the Gambia (ECOMIG)

Guinea-Bissau

- UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS)
- AU Liaison Office in Guinea-Bissau
- ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB)
- ▷ ECOWAS mediator for Guinea-Bissau

Kenya

- ▶ UN special envoy for the Great Lakes Region* (Angola, Burundi, CAR, DRC, Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia)

Libya

- UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)
- ▷ AU high representative for Libya
- AU Liaison Office in Libya

Madagascar

- AU/Southern African Development Community (SADC) Liaison Office in Madagascar

Mali

- UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)
- G5 Sahel Joint Force** (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger)
- AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL)*
- ▷ AU high representative for Mali and the Sahel*

Senegal

- UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)* (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Togo)
- UN support to the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission*

Somalia

- UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)
- AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)
- ▷ Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) special envoy for Somalia

Sudan/Darfur

- UN-AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)
- ▶ UN special adviser to Sudan
- ▷ AU envoy to Sudan
- AU Liaison Office in Sudan

Abyei

- UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA)

South Sudan

- UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS)
- AU Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army** (CAR, DRC, South Sudan, Uganda)
- AU Liaison Office in South Sudan
- ▷ AU high representative for South Sudan
- IGAD-led Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission
- ▷ IGAD special envoy for South Sudan

Western Sahara

- UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)
- ▶ UN Personal Envoy to Western Sahara
- ▷ AU special envoy for Western Sahara

UN country teams with peace and development advisers

- Burkina Faso, Comoros, Cameroon, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, the Gambia, Kenya, Liberia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Madagascar, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe

Institutions such as the newly inaugurated AU Development Agency (AUDA), a successor to the New Partnership for African Development, as well as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and the Pan-African Parliament to a lesser degree, have all, in some way, contributed to the advancement of the AU's approach to peacebuilding and PCRDR.

These organs and agencies are, however, similarly affected by the AU's current structural reform process and will likely go through a process of review of their mandates and functions in the coming year. In addition, the newly established AUCPCRDR, hosted by Egypt, could potentially bolster cooperation over peacebuilding between the two organisations, as detailed in the text box.

Financing

Sustainable financing for multilateral interventions is critical to the long-term trajectory of the UN-AU peacebuilding partnership. The June 2020 virtual PBC consultation about the 2020 PBA review contextualised the problem, stating that:

adequate, predictable and sustained financing of peacebuilding efforts is the cornerstone of effective responses to assist countries to build and sustain peace over time. However, this widely acknowledged and understood requirement of peacebuilding continues to be an unmet challenge.⁶⁰

Examining the potential of the new AU Centre for PCRDR

The AUCPCRDR has long been envisaged as a flagship entity for AU engagement in peacebuilding. The centre, which was initially proposed in January 2011,⁶¹ has been one of Egypt's key priorities and continued to be so during its term as AU chair in 2019.

Formally established in December 2019,⁶² the centre's structure and mandate were approved by AU Summit in February 2020 and a dedicated start-up team is currently based in Addis Ababa working on key technical aspects of putting it into operation.

The centre is intended to support the AU Commission directly, reinvigorating and activating the PCRDR policy framework. One interviewee noted that the centre should ideally '... serve as a dedicated capacity to support the AU Commission in focusing its resources and personnel to advance the normative and operational evolution of the AU's PCRDR agenda'.⁶³

In other words, it is envisaged as the implementing arm of the AUCPCRDR framework, through research, convening events and in-country implementation. The centre is already assuming these responsibilities although it is not yet operating. An AU PSC communiqué in May 2020 on the AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), for example, requested the AUCPCRDR to undertake a technical needs assessment mission for Darfur.⁶⁴

Some interviewees argue that growing momentum behind the centre is directly related to the way in which the AU's existing peacebuilding and PCRDR approaches have been marginalised in the past. This marginalisation prevented the PSD from clearly defining its specific role, functions, and responses to the needs of states affected by conflict, necessitating the establishment of a dedicated entity. The centre is expected to mobilise skills (including through the AU's regular budget) that will help the AUC and the AU PSC better define their role, functions and responses to support countries emerging from conflict.

Some interviewees were, however, sceptical of the potential impact of the AUCPCRDR; an issue that may be complicated by the commission's ongoing reform process. In addition, practical questions about the centre's resourcing and capacity requirements remain unresolved.

While the centre could potentially contribute more political attention, dedicated skills and momentum to AU PCRDR approaches, they argued that locating the centre of gravity for the PCRDR outside Addis Ababa may render the subject even more peripheral than other peace and security activities.

The UN Secretary-General lamented that, ‘financing committed for peacebuilding activities at present is unpredictable, ad hoc in nature and insufficient to ensure that the root causes of conflict are addressed’.⁶⁵

The 2018 Pathways for Peace Report and the PBF’s 2020–2024 strategy underscore the growing gaps between official development assistance and peacebuilding funding. Leveraging UN and AU resources for catalytic, short-term peacebuilding support is therefore an important step forward.

The newly established AUCPCRD could potentially bolster cooperation between the two organisations

The PBF is the most visible UN funding mechanism for peacebuilding in Africa.⁶⁶ Between 2017 and 2019 the PBF invested approximately US\$276 million in 27 countries in Africa, representing 52% of total investments during this period.⁶⁷

PBF funding has served as one tool for closer UN-AU collaboration. For example, in an effort to strengthen participation in peacebuilding efforts the PBF has provided funding for the AU-led African Initiative in the

Central African Republic to ensure the inclusion of young people and women in an initiative in support of the peace agreement. It provided similar support for the Juba Peace Process in Sudan.

In comparison to the AU, the UN is able to pool and direct funds expeditiously to on-the-ground interventions and programming (generally within 10 months).⁶⁸ PBF funding enabling the AU to deploy human rights observers to Burundi in 2016–2017 was the first instance of direct funding (see text box).⁶⁹

In spite of these efforts, however, a number of lingering concerns about the effectiveness of the PBF remain unaddressed. The total amount of funding available, for example, pales in comparison to international development assistance or UN peacekeeping budgets and is a clear indicator of the relative level of commitment of member states to peacebuilding practice.

In addition, access to PBF funding remains particularly challenging for actors outside of the UN system and can be especially frustrating for local-level civil society organisations. While the PBF is diversifying its strategic priorities, with a strong emphasis on inclusive approaches, it remains a tool largely accessible only to UN actors.

Lessons from PBF funding for human rights observers in Burundi

The UN PBF’s funding for the short-term deployment of AU human rights observers to Burundi was its first direct financial contribution to the AU Commission. It was an interim measure to assist the AU to execute an AU PSC decision in response to the country’s ongoing political instability.

The PBF project funded the salaries of 32 human rights observers between April 2016 and February 2017 to the tune of about US\$2.5 million as a stopgap before the disbursement of funding from the European Union. These efforts enabled the maintenance of an international human rights presence during a period of heightened security threats. However, misunderstandings between the two organisations as well as internal challenges

within the AU led to a two-year delay in the submission of a final report to the PBF, which placed considerable strain on the relationship between the two organisations.⁷⁰

Regardless, the AU should nonetheless continue to position itself to capitalise on new opportunities for financial support for targeted projects. This is even more important in light of the potential role of the AUCPCRD as a project implementer, along with the continued debate about the AU Peace Fund’s role and limitations. These should also be incentivised by the Memorandum of Understanding established with the PBSO in 2017, which specifically sought to lay the bureaucratic groundwork for more project- and financially-driven collaboration.⁷¹

In the context of their programming mandates, AULOs have historically relied on donor funding for a much smaller set of resources to meet narrower mandates. AU-led 'quick impact projects' and 'peace strengthening projects', for example, generally receive budget allocations of between US\$50 000 and US\$500 000.⁷² The problems of sustainable funding have an impact on the AU's in-country visibility, mandate and effectiveness, largely limiting the organisation to playing a political and strategic role.

This leads to a chicken-and-egg-type problem that generally applies to all multilateral organisations engaged in peacebuilding. On the one hand, the appetite of member states for providing greater financial contributions for interventions and programming is informed by an organisation's track record and effectiveness on the ground.⁷³ On the other, an organisation's effectiveness on the ground is directly informed by the amount of funding it receives through member state contributions.

Accordingly, given that their political objectives supersede their programming initiatives, the AU and its member states need to assess more critically how AULOs can best achieve their mandates.

The ongoing functioning of the AU Peace Fund is expected to showcase AU member states' commitment to predictable and sustainable financing and is anticipated to lead to a total endowment of US\$400 million by 2021.⁷⁴ As at February 2020 the AU Peace Fund had mobilised approximately US\$176 million.⁷⁵ The revived fund has focused renewed attention on how AU member states, through their direct contributions, can pool their resources and direct them towards targeted interventions and peacebuilding-related programming.

Recent AU decisions in relation to the Peace Fund deliberately excluded PCRD-related funding: the fund's three 'windows' are directed at mediation and preventive diplomacy, institutional capacity and peace support operations.

According to AU officials, this decision was based on the organisation's own conclusion that other multilateral actors are better leveraged to play a peacebuilding-oriented investment role – further highlighting the vital importance of greater engagement with the private sector and international financial institutions.

The Peace Fund window on mediation and preventive diplomacy does, however, mention the need to finance the work of AU liaison offices.⁷⁶ And while peacebuilding-focused programming may not be an immediate area of concern for the Peace Fund, the mechanism does provide an opportunity to contribute to timely and predictable support. Commissioner Chergui has, however, cautioned that it should not be viewed as a source of long-term or large-scale funding on its own accord.⁷⁷

The problems of sustainable funding impact on the AU's in-country visibility, mandate and effectiveness

Moreover, even if the AU Peace Fund is able to achieve its US\$400 million endowment target by 2021 this would still be a comparatively small amount and would need to be used carefully to sustain multiple interventions, especially if the fund is also used to sustain peace support operations or other activities related to mediation.

A capacitated and active AU Peace Fund could represent a key development in helping the AU sustain whatever limited peacebuilding programming it believes to be necessary. Throughout this process AU stakeholders would do well to recognise some of the key lessons from and challenges with prior funding models such as the African Solidarity Initiative (ASI), which was arguably one of the most ambitious efforts to pool the resources and expertise of African member states in support of the peacebuilding programming.

The ASI, which was adopted during the 19th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2012, was specifically aimed at mobilising resources for PCRD efforts led by the AU.

It relies on ad-hoc and voluntary contributions, making it difficult to sustain adequate resources and political buy-in despite its active status as a flagship initiative.⁷⁸ AU officials are mobilising a revitalisation strategy to increase the visibility of the ASI and capitalise on the inauguration of the new AU Development Agency.

Capitalising on emergent peacebuilding approaches

Recent UN and AU peacebuilding initiatives have sought out new practices amid evolving norms, rapidly changing contexts in Africa and persistent resource constraints. These practices cut across strategic and operational issues. And while some of the adaptations are directly aimed at promoting closer cooperation between the UN and the AU on peacebuilding issues others represent underexplored new avenues for a more coherent partnership.

At the operational level the UN and AU have the opportunity to align planning and analytical processes, refine structures to facilitate joint programming and capitalise on the UN development system's reforms to target a more diverse set of institutional entry points.

While joint analysis and planning processes are common tools for UN-AU cooperation over conflict prevention and peacekeeping,⁷⁹ little progress has been made in replicating these processes for peacebuilding. For instance, while the PBF's work with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and ECCAS is generally productive, coordination largely takes place without direct engagement from the AU.

While these engagements take place against the backdrop of the RECs being specifically recognised as regional focal points for PCRD within the AU's PCRD Framework, a more direct, robust and institutionalised engagement by the AU is noticeably absent.

The use of AU analyses could provide nuanced and novel insights into national and regional political dynamics

This is an important element of the peacebuilding debate, especially since it is envisioned that RECs will implement the AU PCRD framework. In particular instances where a REC has a strong country-specific presence, direct cooperation with UN peacebuilding actors makes sense. However, in many contemporary peacebuilding instances the AU is well positioned to provide a political umbrella that can help backstop ongoing processes and support efforts to establish broader political stability.

Nonetheless, the use of AU analyses, where appropriate, could provide nuanced and novel insights into national and regional political dynamics.⁸⁰ In this regard, Ambassador Liberata Mulamula (a member of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Panel on the 2020 PBA Review and of the Fifth PBF Advisory Group) cited in her remarks to the June 2020 Africa Consultation on the PBA Review the importance to peacebuilding efforts of greater UN-AU cooperation and planning.⁸¹

A number of existing tools and frameworks could be considered to better leverage closer cooperation. With the Common Country Assessments now anchored as the UN country-wide planning and coordination frameworks in support of the SDGs, UN officials have indicated that they also strive to identify opportunities for convergence with the AU's Agenda 2063.

Other officials have suggested that the UN, the AU and relevant RECs (along with other multilateral organisations) could adopt a similar methodology and framework for the Recovery and Peace-Building Assessment (RPBA) used in the Central African Republic or the Prevention and Peacebuilding Assessment used in Burkina Faso.⁸²

The RPBA was specifically cited by some UN officials as a relatively successful analysis and planning tool used jointly by different multilateral organisations.⁸³ The UN and the AU could also model joint analytical products on previous joint analysis and planning exercises used for cooperation over UNAMID and the AU Mission to Somalia.

The AU also has a number of voluntary, nationally-led assessment tools such as the Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (which was piloted in Ghana)⁸⁴ and the APRM country review reports, which can align with broader prevention, peacebuilding and governance initiatives.

If these tools are endorsed and used comprehensively they could help national actors articulate coherently their own peacebuilding needs, mobilise national policies to address these needs and identify tangible areas for support from international partners.

Emerging peacebuilding practices also offer the organisations a number of opportunities to complement one another more effectively. Recent AU PCRD deployments to the Gambia and the Lake Chad

Basin region have demonstrated a noticeable shift in the AU's approaches.

These initiatives are premised on lighter footprints and narrower mandates that are aligned with defined needs and in support of national institutions and regional approaches.⁸⁵ Their methods are also unique.

The AU mission to the Gambia, for example, is based on sponsoring co-location in government offices, whereas AU support for the Lake Chad Basin Commission aims to foster closer regional cooperation while providing a

development anchor to accompany an ongoing counter-terrorism operation.

These initiatives operate alongside a range of bilateral and UN support measures that reinforce the AU's substantive priorities, including through the PBC.⁸⁶ Such approaches demonstrate how the AU can promote African-led technical expertise alongside the legitimacy that it carries as part of its continental mandate, and can be complemented by the UN's programmatic and financial channels.

A model for future peacebuilding engagement?

The AU Technical Support Mission to the Gambia (AUTSTG) is a unique model of AU-led PCRD engagement and may represent a shift towards more context-specific AU deployments built around national ownership and a comparatively light footprint.

The mission, which was deployed in 2018, comprises ten civilian and military experts co-located on a full-time basis in the Gambia's Ministry of Interior, National Human Rights Commission, Armed Forces, Office of National Security and Constitutional Review Commission. These officials focus on providing broad strategic guidance on security sector reform, in addition to providing more concrete technical support for policy development and implementation in other areas related to governance and reconciliation.

The Gambia is not, by traditional standards, a post-conflict country. The co-location model is a significant departure from the AU's practice of establishing standing in-country offices and this is an encouraging development, particularly as it relates to potential impact versus cost-effectiveness. With an explicit mandate to support the Gambian government's self-identified needs and priorities, the AUTSTG is anchored in a nationally-owned approach.

This approach is different from other AU liaison offices mandated to facilitate political processes

and work with a broader range of national and international actors. The model also enables the AU to leverage more firmly its comparative advantages of 'ideology and political legitimacy' through direct engagements inside of the government at senior and working levels.⁸⁷

The mission's recent experiences also offer important reflections for closer UN and AU peacebuilding efforts. The AU is a part of two coordination mechanisms alongside ECOWAS, the UN (including UNDP and the PBF), the EU and bi-lateral partners: a Security Sector Reform Steering Committee and an International Advisory Group.

Mutangadura and Yohannes highlight how the Gambia epitomises the importance of coordination in 'complex peacebuilding or post-conflict reconstruction systems which involve numerous national and international actors engaged in multiple simultaneous stabilisation efforts'.⁸⁸

However, they also observe that coordination is a continual process that requires additional efforts to adapt project planning and implementation to accommodate different working methods. Although the UN PBC and the AU PSC both engage on the Gambia there are opportunities for both organisations to improve political-level coordination between themselves and with other

UN peacekeeping transitions offer another obvious entry point for closer alignment. Mission reconfigurations, drawdowns or withdrawals are often intended to pivot the organisation's focus towards stronger development and peacebuilding engagements.

The UN does, however, lose some political leverage during these processes, especially as it attempts to engage with a smaller operational footprint.⁸⁹ AU-led political support is an obvious co-contributor in these situations, supporting common UN-AU peacebuilding goals and objectives. This was evident after the departure in 2019 of the UN Mission in Liberia when the AU Liaison Office provided high-level political support to the newly reconstituted UN Country Team.⁹⁰

But these transition situations also give the AU a valuable opportunity to identify specific projects in which it can combine its political value-add with targeted technical expertise. The drawdown of UNAMID and the ongoing UN reconfiguration offer another immediate opportunity for closer collaboration, and the AU PSC has already mandated the AUCPCRD in Cairo to lead a technical needs assessment mission to Sudan.⁹¹ This support will continue to be necessary as the UN begins to consider transitions in other complex environments like the DRC and Mali.

Towards a more effective peacebuilding partnership

Limited progress in the UN-AU peacebuilding partnership is the product of many factors. Differences in the policy frameworks of the organisations, especially in terms of when and where member states believe peacebuilding interventions should take place, create confusion and undermine the potential to explore new areas of collaboration. Although member states commit rhetorically to a closer peacebuilding partnership, there are few tangible and action-oriented outcomes from the UN PBC's and AU PSC's annual dialogue.

These efforts are exacerbated by different member state priorities within broader peacebuilding agendas, as well as by the AU PSC's much broader peace and security mandate, which leads to the unintentional marginalisation of peacebuilding-specific efforts.

Divergent institutional mandates and operational capacities mean that the two organisations use their

peacebuilding agendas differently. These differences not only minimise opportunities for interaction in country settings, they also make such interaction less of a priority during policy-level exchanges. While the UN PBF is a significant investment arm for funding both UN and non-UN peacebuilding in Africa, the AU's only comparable tool is years away from having any similar impact.

Despite these challenges, the partnership's strong foundation and the evolution of the organisations' peacebuilding efforts offer a number of opportunities to strengthen a more coherent inter-institutional peacebuilding agenda.

Although member states commit to a closer peacebuilding partnership, there are few tangible outcomes

Continental support for the UN's sustaining peace approach and meaningful input from African member states into the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture review is helping to forge a shared set of priorities and thematic interests. The UNPBC and AU PSC's commitments to regularise their meetings and use their platforms for more flexible and diverse discussions further signal a growing alignment of interests and political will among member states.

In addition, encouraging peacebuilding collaboration in the Gambia, the Lake Chad Basin and the Central African Republic demonstrate that the AU can marry its political leverage on the continent with light, yet targeted and impactful, operational programming.

A stronger peacebuilding partnership, therefore, requires the UN, the AU and their member states to reinforce their political commitment to peacebuilding-focused collaboration as well as strengthening operational engagements at headquarters and country levels. In addition, a stronger partnership would also entail both organisations arriving at a more comprehensive understanding of the bounds and limits of each other's roles within particular peacebuilding contexts.

The organisations need to prioritise consensus building around the political strategies that define and underpin

peacebuilding. Member states, the UNPBC and the AU PSC should also continue to focus on recognising shared peacebuilding concerns, particularly as these relate to the root causes and structural drivers of conflict, priorities for collective action and the key local, regional and international actors needed to support or leverage progress within given peacebuilding contexts.

Moreover, the UNSC and AU PSC should consistently ensure the centrality of inclusion and local ownership to effective peacebuilding while recognising and investing in intra-regional and cross-border peacebuilding strategies.

The organisations need to prioritise consensus-building around political strategies for peacebuilding

Lastly, the UN and AU should explore critically ways to support one another in different countries, alongside sub-regional actors. The AU Technical Support Mission to the Gambia shows how the AU could more easily mobilise and sustain context-specific interventions with comparatively light footprints.

The AU PSC and the AU Commission should also evaluate the efficacy of this co-deployment model for its potential applicability to and feasibility in other peacebuilding situations. The effectiveness of this model should also be assessed in greater technical detail at a headquarters level among stakeholders across the UN Secretariat.

Recommendations

- UN and AU member states should consider building consensus about shared peacebuilding concerns, including through the AU PSC, UNSC and UNPBC. They should also consider better leveraging legitimacy, complementarity and comparative advantages, including in specific country settings where the organisations maintain different mandates and footprints.
- In order to enhance greater inter-institutional coherence in peacebuilding efforts, the scheduled annual engagements between UN DPPA, UN DPO and the AU PSD should prioritise the inclusion and greater

engagement of officials from the UN PBSO, DCO and UNDP, alongside the newly established AUCPCRD, as well as relevant UNCT and AU Liaison Office personnel. The AU's Partnership Management and Coordination Division should also be better leveraged to improve synergies across the full spectrum of standing UN-AU peacebuilding engagements.

- AU PSC member-state representatives should aim to institutionalise a better working relationship with the African Peacebuilding Caucus of the UN's Africa Group. Many lessons could be drawn from the development of the AU PSC's engagements with the three African member states on the UNSC (the A3), and how this has contributed to a more coherent and collective African political identity across these critical multilateral bodies. In addition, members of the AU PSC should prioritise putting into operation the council's statutory sub-committee on PCRD.
- The AU PSC and UNPBC should aim to strengthen implementation of the recommendations from the 2018 annual meeting on improved working methods. This could practically entail the AU PSC committee of experts meeting with the UNPBC in advance of annual meetings in a similar way to the UNSC-AU PSC. Other practical steps could include: sharing calendars and priorities regarding regional and thematic discussions, joint briefings and VTC discussions, informal shared analyses and joint efforts to promote resource mobilisation for specific countries and regions. These could help to align more tangibly discussions and ideas for collective action. UNPBC engagements with the RECs should also aim to be as consistent as possible, through the triangular partnership with the AU. Given that certain RECs, such as ECOWAS, have a much more direct and autonomous working relationship with the UNPBC, key stakeholders from all sides should aim to ensure that the peacebuilding engagements of all RECs are on an equal footing and are coordinated through common UN-AU-RECs practices.
- The UN PBSO and the UN Development Coordination Office should explore opportunities to conduct more effective joint analysis and planning exercises for peacebuilding activities with AU and REC counterparts. These could expand beyond traditional post-conflict environments to include efforts in

stabilisation environments and countries undergoing transition. They could include methodologies like the UN Common Country Assessments and could incorporate lessons learned from previous joint analysis and planning exercises.

- The AU PCRD Interdepartmental Task Force should strive to build working relationships with the UN DCO and the UN's regional Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) to share analysis and offer targeted expertise. UN DPPA and UNDP should invite AU and REC officials to contribute to discussions during annual sessions of PDAs deployed to the African continent. Greater efforts could also be made to strengthen coherence with the Joint Task Force on Peace and Security which convenes biannually on the margins of the AU Summit and UN General Assembly.

Conclusion

Peacebuilding on the African continent, from both a UN and AU perspective, is approaching a critical juncture. Continued gaps in inclusive governance, socio-economic development and social cohesion perpetuate fragility in many countries and regions. In spite of this, investment in peacebuilding interventions and programming aimed at addressing root causes and structural drivers of conflict continue to be significantly outpaced by military expenditures, as well as a reliance on costly peacekeeping and peace support operations.

Although the interplay of localised grievances, cross-border flows of people and resources and vested external political interests further amplify the complexities of developing coherent and sustainable multilateral responses, peacebuilding practices in the UN and AU systems have evolved considerably in the past 15 years.

Common principles relating to local ownership, national inclusion and tailored context-sensitive interventions have come to define a more comprehensive peacebuilding agenda despite certain conceptual and operational distinctions. The scale and complexity

of contemporary conflict dynamics do, however, necessitate a much closer, more coherent and better coordinated UN-AU peacebuilding partnership anchored in the comparative strengths of the organisations, while recognising key limitations.

Neither organisation can single-handedly drive effective peacebuilding efforts

The UN's 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture review and the ongoing AU structural reform process thus opens a vital window of opportunity for all concerned multilateral stakeholders to reflect on why the strategic partnership on peace and security matters to peacebuilding.

Such reflections are critical in determining tangible ways in which the partnership could be strengthened by better aligning both organisations' peacebuilding approaches at strategic, political and operational levels.

It is clear that neither organisation can single-handedly drive effective peacebuilding efforts, given the complexity of contemporary conflict dynamics and the multitude of diverse and disparate local, regional and international political interests and actors that need to be taken into account in any given peacebuilding strategy.

A structured and predictable UN-AU peacebuilding partnership grounded in shared values, aligned political objectives and a clear understanding of the partners' complementarity and limitations is thus vital in responding to ongoing and emergent peace and security challenges.

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Notes

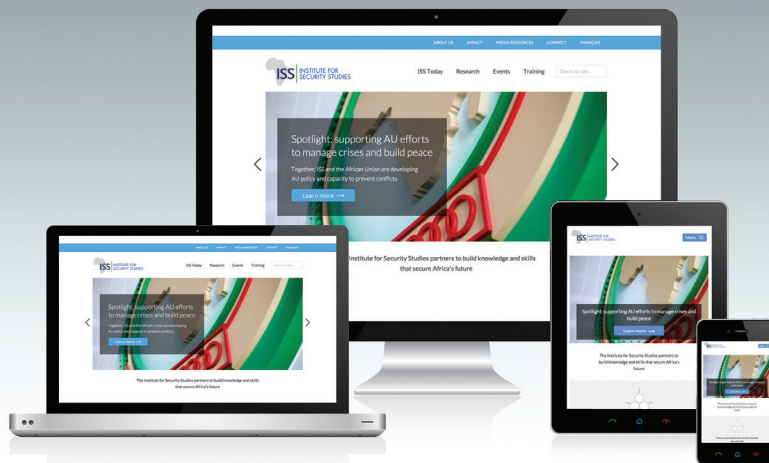
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