



Peace & Security Council Report

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Regional coordination against COVID-19: what role for the RECs?

As African Union (AU) member states prepare for the scheduled mid-year coordination meeting between the AU Bureau and regional economic communities (RECs), initially planned for early July, RECs are increasingly coordinating their efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

This has had mixed results because of the challenge of translating decisions into action, and because RECs do not seem to have adequately communicated their strategies to the African public.

In some cases, RECs have also chosen to defer to the continental action taken by AU Chairperson President Cyril Ramaphosa rather than duplicating efforts such as creating special COVID-19 funds.

Buhari leading ECOWAS responses

In West Africa, both the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA, composed of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger and Togo) have taken action to coordinate efforts to address the spread of COVID-19 and its consequences.

The implementation of these resolutions is largely dependent on how each country mitigates the impact of the pandemic at national level

ECOWAS held a virtual extraordinary summit of heads of state on COVID-19 on 23 April 2020, and designated President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria as the champion to coordinate its efforts. The strategy essentially revolved around putting in place regional mechanisms to create linkages among the scientific communities in each country and exchange good practices related to fighting the pandemic.

ECOWAS decided not to create a special fund but rather endow the one that had been set up by the AU in early April, following a meeting of the bureau convened by Ramaphosa.

Addressing the economic impact of COVID-19

UEMOA countries – which share a common central bank and currency – also met on 27 April to discuss measures against COVID-19, with a particular emphasis on the economic response.

The organisation decided to allocate close to US\$9 billion to alleviate the impact of the pandemic on employment and production. The funds would be

Current PSC Chairperson

His Excellency Salah Francis Elhamdi, ambassador of Algeria to Ethiopia and permanent representative to the African Union.

PSC members

Algeria, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal

raised through government-issued 'COVID-19 social bonds' to be purchased on the regional market.

The UEMOA also decided to temporarily suspend the 'convergence, stability, growth and solidarity pact', which aims to limit debt and inflation in the monetary union.

While the whole West African region shows an increase in COVID-19 cases (around 62 500 positive cases, just under 1 200 deaths and nearly 33 300 recoveries as of 22 June) and the internal borders of ECOWAS remain closed, populations dependent on cross-border trade activities continue to be among the hardest hit.

The UEMOA decided to temporarily suspend the convergence, stability, growth and solidarity pact, which aims to limit debt and inflation

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) has also developed a strategy to fight COVID-19 and its effects in Central Africa. The response comprises four points: prevent the spread of the virus; limit the mortality rate and manage positive cases; respond to the socio-economic and security impact of COVID-19; and respond to cross-border security issues caused by the pandemic.

The implementation of these common resolutions is, however, largely dependent on how each country mitigates the impact of the pandemic at national level. To date, Central Africa has officially recorded around 29 600 cases of COVID-19, close to 650 deaths and nearly 12 800 recoveries.

Border closures hamper joint action by the EAC

The East African Community (EAC) was quick to react to the threat of COVID-19 by convening a meeting of the region's ministers of health and EAC affairs on 25 March.

It agreed on a strategy aiming to, among others, 'ensure a joint and well-coordinated mechanism to fight COVID-19 in the region; facilitate the movement of goods and services; minimize the number of people who become infected or sick with COVID-19; [and] minimize morbidity and mortality from the COVID-19 pandemic'.

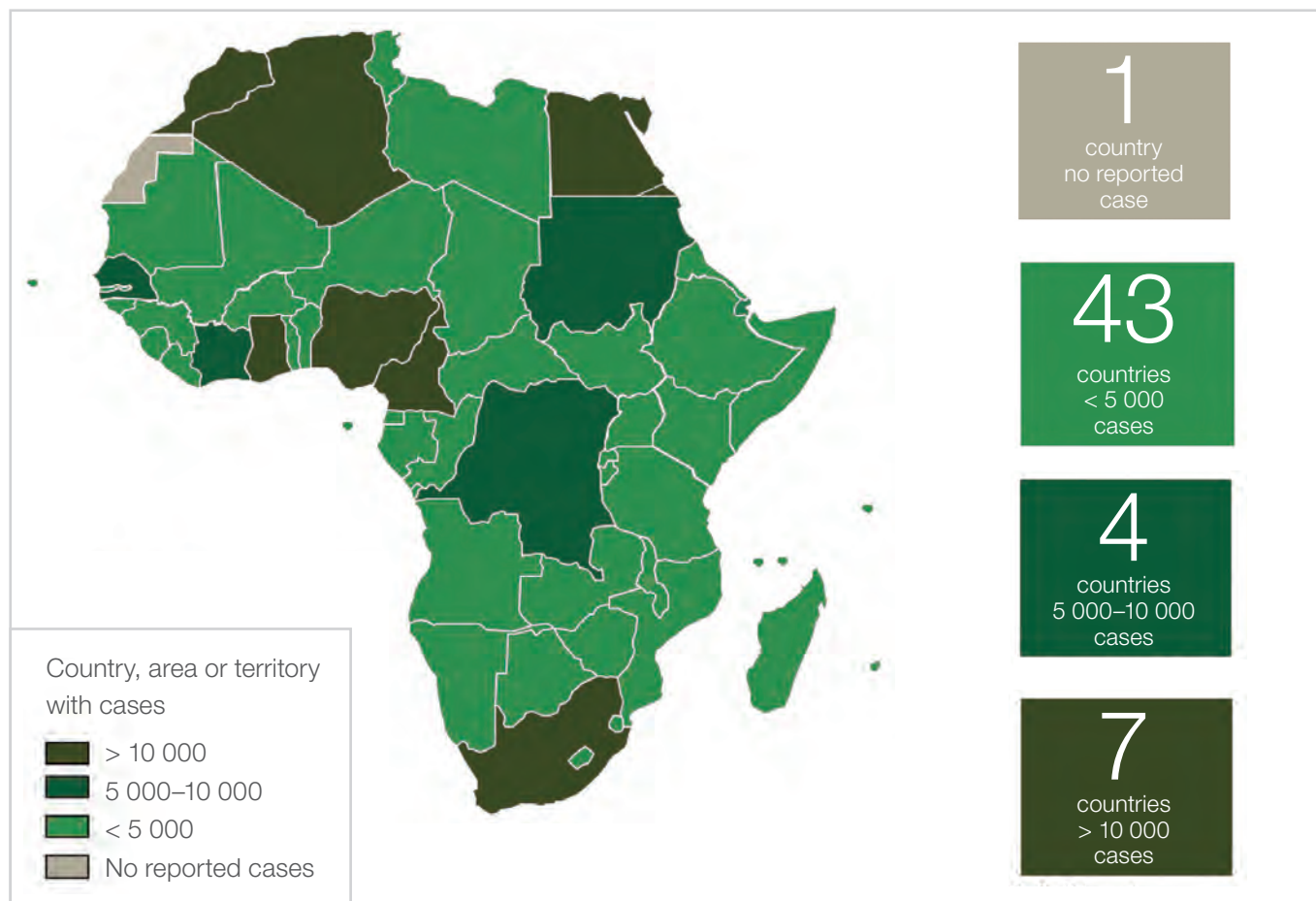
Owing to restrictions placed on truck drivers, intra-regional trade was severely disrupted. Cross-border movement of essential goods within the region became problematic for countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.

Systematic but disorganised testing at different border points created serious delays, causing some perishable goods to be spoiled, while also placing truck drivers at further risk of getting infected. In some cases, truck drivers who tested positive were simply sent back to their countries.

62 500

COVID-19 CASES IN WEST
AFRICA ON 22 JUNE

Figure 1: AU member states reporting COVID-19 cases as of 22 June 2020 pm EAT



Source: Africa CDC. Africa numbers are taken from official RCC and member state reports

Tanzanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Palamagamba Kabudi, also current chair of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Council of Ministers, lamented the fact that truck drivers had been stigmatised as carriers of the virus. He appealed for ‘the dignity of truck drivers to be respected’ during a virtual SADC meeting last month. Tanzania is a member of both SADC and the EAC.

Harmonising policies in SADC easier said than done

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, SADC has placed much of its focus on trying to maintain the momentum of its regional trade agenda, albeit with great difficulty.

On 6 April ministers of transport met in Tanzania and adopted ‘Regional Guidelines on Harmonization and Facilitation of Movement of Essential Goods and Services’, in an attempt to prevent huge delays during

the lockdowns and ensure that essential goods could still circulate. Many landlocked countries in the region are dependent on imports.

Member states agreed to create facilitation committees and a liaison office was set up at the SADC Secretariat in Gaborone to assist with any hiccups in the process.

SADC has placed much of its focus on trying to maintain the momentum of its regional trade agenda

However, harmonising border protocols during lockdown, with restrictions and quarantine measures differing from country to country, was easier said than done.

SADC Executive Secretary Stergomena Tax admitted in her speech during the opening session of the SADC

Council of Ministers' meeting on 28 May that the strategy faced many obstacles, including the unilateral implementation of measures by some governments and non-compliance with the agreed regional protocol.

Focus on pooled procurement

Besides trying to tackle border issues, SADC has also encouraged its 16 member states to procure essential medical supplies and equipment for the fight against COVID-19 from one another, rather than trying to import these from elsewhere at huge cost. How this will fit into the continent-wide strategy to create procurement platforms through the AU is not clear.

Still, at the risk of doubling of efforts, a mapping exercise of regional suppliers has been concluded, according to Tax, and the SADC Council of Ministers has appealed to countries to buy from their neighbours.

Many member states lack basic healthcare infrastructure, and most citizens do not have access to quality healthcare

The danger of African countries' dependence on imports has been one of the hard lessons learnt by African governments during the pandemic. The lack of proper disaster management and readiness systems for such calamities is also a lesson for Africa and countries around the world.

SADC started working on its 'Strategy for Pooled Procurement of Essential Medicines and Health Commodities' over 10 years ago. Now should be the time to see such forward thinking paying off. However, many member states lack basic healthcare infrastructure, and most citizens do not have access to quality healthcare service.

Mobilising funds

While most SADC member states will benefit from AU initiatives such as the Solidarity Fund and various philanthropic donations, the secretariat has raised just over €10 million for COVID-19 responses. This has been from the German government and the European Union, Tax told ministers at their meeting last month.

COVID-19 has clearly been a test for regional and continental leadership. Unfortunately, the chair of SADC during this time, Tanzania, has not shown any clear regional leadership. In fact, the country and its leader, John Magufuli, have been criticised for denialism.

AU coordination

Although all these regions – in spite of closing their borders to the movement of people – made specific and concrete efforts to allow the movement of essential goods, the general restrictions have negatively affected trade and threatened food security.

€10
million

RAISED BY SADC FOR
COVID-19 RESPONSES

In addition to each regional response, Ramaphosa also convened two meetings, on 29 April and 12 June 2020, with the current chairs of each REC to discuss progress with the continental and regional strategies. This has led to the creation of the 'Africa Medical Supplies Portal', which is a 'single continental market

place where African countries can access critical medical supplies'.

Well-coordinated regional strategies will be crucial in fighting the pandemic and ensuring much-needed economic recovery efforts post-COVID-19 are successfully implemented.

Table 1: AU member states reporting COVID-19 cases, deaths and recoveries by region

MEMBER STATE/REGION	CASES	DEATHS	RECOVERIES
Central region	29 841	651	12 807
Burundi	144	1	93
Cameroon	11 892	303	7 710
Central African Republic	2 808	23	472
Chad	858	74	752
Congo	1 087	37	456
DRC	5 925	135	856
Equatorial Guinea	2 001	32	515
Gabon	4 428	34	1 750
São Tomé and Príncipe	698	12	203
Eastern region	31 853	956	13 605
Comoros	247	5	159
Djibouti	4 599	48	3 859
Eritrea	143	0	39
Ethiopia	4 663	75	1 297
Kenya	4 797	123	1 607
Madagascar	1 640	15	692
Mauritius	340	10	326
Rwanda	728	2	359
Seychelles	11	0	11
Somalia	2 812	90	818
South Sudan	1 892	34	169
Sudan	8 698	533	3 460
Tanzania	509	21	178
Uganda	774	0	631
Northern region	81 597	3 421	33 263
Algeria	11 771	845	8 422

MEMBER STATE/REGION	CASES	DEATHS	RECOVERIES
Egypt	55 233	2 193	14 736
Libya	544	10	70
Mauritania	2 813	109	696
Morocco	10 079	214	8 319
Tunisia	1 157	50	1 020
Southern region	101 685	1 978	53 735
Angola	183	9	97
Botswana	89	1	25
Eswatini	635	5	285
Lesotho	12	0	2
Malawi	749	11	258
Mozambique	733	5	181
Namibia	63	0	21
South Africa	97 302	1 930	51 608
Zambia	1 430	11	1 194
Zimbabwe	489	6	64
Western region	62 503	1 143	33 298
Benin	765	13	253
Burkina Faso	903	53	819
Cape Verde	890	8	413
Côte d'Ivoire	7 492	54	3 068
Gambia	37	2	24
Ghana	14 154	85	10 473
Guinea	4 988	27	3 669
Guinea-Bissau	1 541	17	153
Liberia	626	34	254
Mali	1 961	111	1 266
Niger	1 036	67	911
Nigeria	20 244	518	6 879
Senegal	5 970	86	3 953
Sierra Leone	1 327	55	788
Togo	569	13	375
Total AU member states	307 479	8 149	146 708

The AU can assist as Somalia prepares for elections

The PSC has discussed the situation in Somalia twice since the beginning of 2020. The meetings focused on upcoming elections, the future of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and the renewal of AMISOM's mandate for an additional nine months.

The AU held another high-level meeting with Somali stakeholders and key partners in April 2020.

Somalia is preparing to hold a historical one-person-one-vote election before the end of 2020. The country is facing multiple threats to its stability from continued terrorist attacks, increased political polarisation, the COVID-19 pandemic, the worst desert locust invasion in decades and floods. These threats have resulted in food insecurity for an estimated 1.3 million people and increased the number of internally displaced persons.

The recent AU engagement in Somalia, therefore, comes at a critical juncture, particularly ahead of the planned drawdown of AMISOM in 2021. In preparation for the latter, the continental body is expected to develop a peace and security strategy for Somalia beyond 2021.

AU involvement beyond counter-terrorism operations

To overcome the current political and security stalemate in the country and effectively contribute to peace and security, the AU's engagement in Somalia has to evolve beyond the counter-terrorism operations currently led by AMISOM.

This engagement should focus on strategic conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts to find a political solution to the Somali crisis. AU efforts should include supporting political and security outreach by the government, as well as community-level conflict resolution and reconciliation work. This would be aimed at counteracting the reinforcing nature of inter-clan conflict and terrorist activities. Particularly important would be AU support for any efforts by Somali stakeholders to consider engaging al-Shabaab in political negotiations.

As it repositions its engagement, the AU can directly contribute to bringing together the federal government and regional states for a political dialogue to overcome their differences. The current electoral process can also benefit from the AU's support, especially to the National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC), in making the electoral process as inclusive, independent and credible as possible. Unless properly managed, the election could further foment polarisation and lead to post-election violence.

The AU can further support the completion of the constitutional review process as part of Somalia's state-building endeavour, and ensure a consultative national dialogue process takes place ahead of a referendum to adopt the constitution.

2021

EXPECTED DRAWDOWN
OF AMISOM

The AU, in collaboration with the United Nations (UN) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), can also lead a political process to help reach regional consensus on setting key priorities for the regional security agenda that also reduces the destabilising effect of great power politics in Somalia.

Such a reconfiguration of the AU's role in the country to include a comprehensive approach to security would be in line with Somalia's Transitional Plan.

Political response to the terrorist threat

Clearly, al-Shabaab is still a significant threat to peace in Somalia. In addition to repeated attacks on AMISOM troops, al-Shabaab has killed three governors from Mudug and Nugal, both in Puntland state, and the governor and mayor of Mogadishu since the beginning of 2020.

The AU can support the completion of the constitutional review process as part of Somalia's state-building endeavour

The impact of terrorism is worsened by Somalia's protracted inter-clan conflict, which involves internal, regional and extra-regional dynamics. Inter-linkages between clan-affiliated militias established in response to growing insecurity, and the manner in which al-Shabaab recruits and operates, also necessitate close scrutiny of the nexus between inter-clan conflict and terrorism.

Continued instability not only undermines the gains AMISOM has achieved since 2007 but also points to a political and security impasse that will not be resolved solely through military intervention.

While successive Somali governments and the AU have mostly resisted the idea of a political dialogue with al-Shabaab, many civil society groups have been calling for talks as an important non-military solution to the conflict.

Internal power rivalries

The political space in Somalia has become further polarised as the country prepares for elections. The contentious relationship between the federal government and regional states is a reflection of this political landscape and is complicated by clan rivalries.

Relations between the federal government and the two regional states of Puntland and Jubaland have especially soured of late. At the centre of the dispute lies the federal system of governance, which states claim has not resulted in the full devolution of power, including the administration of security forces, or the equitable sharing of resources.

Disagreements on key outstanding issues have had politically polarising consequences that further destabilise the country. These issues include the inclusiveness and transparency of the constitutional review process, the

1.3
million
FOOD INSECURE PEOPLE
IN SOMALIA

legislative process that led to the adoption of the new electoral law, and the universal suffrage electoral system meant to replace the clan-based quota electoral system.

COVID-19 a threat to election preparations

The date of the upcoming elections will be confirmed by the NIEC on 27 June. However, it is feared that the current political and security context, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, may not create conducive conditions for an election to take place in 2020. Yet any possible delay will be rejected by regional states, which fear that the president will take the opportunity to extend his term in office.

The AU seems to be pushing for timely elections and has called on international partners to mobilise resources to this end. While the AU is providing training and technical support to the NIEC and other stakeholders in the electoral process, COVID-19 has posed serious challenges in carrying out these planned activities. The AU has also called for dialogue between the federal government and regional states, but this has yet to take place.

Lack of regional consensus

Regional rivalries clearly have the potential to hamper the collective continental response in Somalia.

Ethiopia and Kenya, both troop-contributing countries to AMISOM, differ on Somali politics. They have accused one another of interfering in the internal politics of the country and of trying to influence electoral outcomes in regional states such as Jubaland, which borders both countries. There have also been allegations of troop movements from both countries outside of the AMISOM umbrella into Doolow border town, heightening tensions along the border.

In addition, relations between Kenya and Somalia are tense as a result of their maritime border dispute. This worsened when heavy fighting between Somali government troops and forces loyal to Ahmed Madobe, the governor of Jubaland, spilled across the Kenyan border. Following the incident each accused the other of trying to destabilise it.

Rivalry among regional actors weakens their coordination and collective action against regional and extra-regional destabilising forces. A broad consensus among regional stakeholders is crucial for the AU's coordinated action in Somalia.



SOMALIA TO HOLD
ELECTIONS IN 2020

A political solution to the Somali crisis

The AU's security and stability strategy for Somalia beyond 2021 should focus on finding a political solution to the crisis. This will involve developing a holistic conflict resolution strategy that responds to the complex and interlinked conflict drivers. It will also require the AU to enhance the civilian capacity within AMISOM and engage both at the strategic and local level.

The signing of a new memorandum of understanding, following that of 2010 between IGAD, the UN Political Office for Somalia and AMISOM, will help to coordinate efforts in this regard.

Crucial months ahead for the AU Commission to implement reforms

Despite restrictions linked to COVID-19, the AU has started the process to elect a new AU Commission (AUC) in January 2021. In line with the AU reform process that began in 2016 under the supervision of Rwandan President Paul Kagame, the new AUC will have fewer commissioners and will be elected through a new merit-based system.

This process is crucial for the continent, given that it will determine the calibre of people running the AUC for the next four years. At this stage little is known about possible candidates for the position of AUC chairperson, although current chair Moussa Faki Mahamat is expected to run for a second term.

Progress so far

The institutional reform of the AU includes a review of the financing model of its operational and programme budgets, the transformation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) into the AU Development Agency (AUDA), and the integration of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and its budget into existing AU structures.

The implementation of the new AU Commission structure coincides with the arrival of newly elected commissioners in 2021

The bulk of the reforms were approved at an AU extraordinary summit in November 2018, in Addis Ababa. Since then the operational budget of the AU is said to be 100% financed through member state contributions, the peace fund has received around US\$150 million (out of the US\$400 million target by 2021), and the new financial management rules for the organisation have been drawn up. NEPAD has become the AUDA-NEPAD and the APRM has been integrated into the AU budget with an extended mandate covering conflict prevention.

Although the broad new structure of the AUC was endorsed at the November 2018 summit – moving from eight to six commissions, including the merger

of the departments of Political Affairs and Peace and Security – its final structure had been work in progress until it was finally approved at the 33rd AU summit in February 2020.

Having been finalised, despite complaints of insufficient internal consultation at all levels within the commission, the implementation of the new AUC structure coincides with the arrival of newly elected commissioners in 2021. This could be an important development for the African body, as it will prove a rare opportunity to align a new structure with new capacity.

Many outstanding issues

While the AU institutional reform has its merits, such as making the organisation more effective and streamlined, it may have overlooked important considerations.

One major issue that remains unaddressed is the proposal to have the six new commissioners chosen and appointed by the AUC chairperson. This proposal was shot down by AU member states and commissioners will remain elected officials. In the past this has not been conducive to performance or accountability, and at times caused divergences over the course of action the commission should take in a particular matter.

Many also believe that the reform should have touched on the PSC in one way or another, in order to give the African body in charge of peace and security matters a much-needed reboot. In fact, this idea was already raised in the well-known 2007 Adedeji Audit of the AU. The audit made specific recommendations aimed at enhancing the performance of the council, including its working methods and the early operationalisation of all the components of the AU Peace and Security

Architecture (APSA – the Panel of the Wise [PoW], the Continental Early Warning System [CEWS] and the African Standby Force [ASF]).

Although much has been done to establish and improve these structures, the APSA has struggled to reach its expected potential and fully play a role in stemming conflict and instability on the continent. For a long time, the PSC’s working methods were a recurrent issue, impeding its proper functioning, while the PoW, CEWS and the ASF have also had their challenges.

The AU institutional reform in its current form may also have missed the opportunity to address the crux of the problem with African institutions and organs

The PSC’s new working methods in the face of COVID-19 restrictions might just bring much-needed change to how the body does its work.

However, the institutional reform does not resolve the ubiquitous divergences between AU member states and AU institutions and organs, in this case the AUC. For instance, while the CEWS may be fulfilling its role in providing early warning to the PSC in spite of some challenges, its technical input into confidential decision-making rarely translates into early action. This results in a gap between early warning and early action despite the existing continental technical capacity to address such gaps.

In addition, the AU institutional reforms did not reconsider the role of the Pan African Parliament (PAP), which remains largely a symbolic institution without the power to fulfil any of the duties of a classic assembly of representatives, such as controlling the actions of African institutions and organs, vote on and/or control the budget of the AU, or pass any regulation or law. This is despite the fact that the transparency resulting from the AU reforms has further exposed issues of mismanagement and wasteful expenditure within the PAP.

The AU institutional reform in its current form may also have missed the opportunity to address the crux of the problem with African institutions and organs. For instance, this would ideally have meant taking a critical look at the totality of continental and regional organisations (RECs) and mechanisms, and overhauling them to create more alignment in their purpose and action. The unresolved question of AU–RECs relations is a case in point.

Finally, reforming the AU could have looked into how to systematically resolve challenges around the ratification of critical AU instruments and their implementation. The AU is a norm entrepreneur, but the ratification and implementation of these norms have always been a thorny issue. Two such important instruments are the African Charter on Democracy,

Pan African Parliament

NOT IMPACTED BY THE
AU REFORMS

Elections and Governance and the Protocol on the Establishment of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.

In the latter case, of the 10 countries that had made the Article 34 (6) declaration allowing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals to bring states directly before the court, four (Rwanda, Tanzania, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire) have now withdrawn their declaration. This effectively prevents citizens and NGOs from directly submitting a matter to the court.

Progress towards the newly revamped commission

With the approval of the new AUC structure during the 33rd AU summit earlier this year, the COVID-19 pandemic has only slightly delayed the process of implementation. This is notwithstanding the fact that it appears the AU border programme, housed in the Peace and Security Department and considered important, was (accidentally) left out of the structure.

The high hopes placed in the new Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) can only be met if the PAPS does not miss its inception phase. Making APSA and the African Governance Architecture work in synergy will be absolutely critical for peace and security on the continent.

Meanwhile, the process of selecting candidates for the senior leadership of the AUC has been ongoing. In March 2020 a panel composed of senior officials from AU member states representing the continent's regions was constituted to kickstart and oversee the selection process, with the help of human resources experts. No representative for North Africa is participating.

Ultimately, the power to elect the commission's senior leadership lies with AU member states, not the African public

According to new recruitment rules for the AUC's senior leadership, once the shortlisting is completed candidates must begin campaigning. The chairperson, his deputy and commissioners are expected to make their case to member states in public debates that are meant to be broadcast across the continent. However, ultimately, the power to elect the commission's senior leadership lies with AU member states, not the African public.

The efficacy and efficiency of the new AUC will depend on the merits of the people chosen to the senior leadership. They will be tasked with implementing the new rules and regulations of the commission and, in this respect, attempt to create a new work culture based on performance and accountability. It is thus important that the ongoing process succeeds in choosing the right people for the available positions.

February
2021

ELECTION OF A NEW
AU COMMISSION

Silencing the guns in Africa's borderlands

The AU commemorated the 10th Africa Border Day on 7 June within the framework of 'Silencing the guns' in Africa, the AU's theme for 2020. According to Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, 'there is no better place to realise the goals of silencing the guns than in the African borderlands'.

The commemoration highlighted the importance of borderlands for regional peace and security, regional integration and development.

Meanwhile, tensions between states over borders that are not demarcated are on the rise on the continent, as witnessed recently between Somalia and Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia, and Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

If borderlands are to become the focus of the African integration project, as per the AU Border Programme's (AUBP) vision for uniting and integrating the continent through peaceful, open and prosperous borders, member states have to prioritise the overall governance of these areas.

This includes demarcating their borders, resolving existing border disputes, investing in the socio-economic development of hinterlands, facilitating cross-border trade and investment, jointly developing cross-border resources, and investing in regional infrastructure development.

Continental efforts to silence the guns in borderlands

Through its Border Programme, the AU has been providing technical support to member states in the delimitation and demarcation of their borders, and the creation of border cooperation structures.

AU-supported consultations have led to the demarcation of the common border between Burkina Faso and Mali in 2012. In addition, a cross-border health centre, shared by the villages of Ouarokoy in Burkina Faso and Wanian in Mali, was constructed.

The AUBP also supported the delimitation of Lake Malawi/Nyassa between Malawi and Mozambique. Similarly, Botswana and Namibia signed a boundary treaty in 2018, after the AU supported them in the process of delimiting their common border. In February

2020 Benin and Togo agreed to demarcate their common land border with pillars and delimit 140km of their river boundary.

Technical support by the AUBP is a much less costly alternative to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for member states trying to settle their border demarcation at the technical level. However, when border disputes lead to political contestation, the AU rarely plays a significant role in the resultant conflict.

AU efforts are fruitful when countries and especially their border areas are at peace. Unfortunately, most member states do not prioritise the demarcation of their borders when they are at peace with their neighbours. When border disputes lead to political contestations, the AU often does not play a significant role in the dispute that emerges.

This is mostly because the PSC, the primary organ tasked with responding to African peace and security issues, seldom puts border disputes on its agenda to be resolved at the political level.

The PSC's willingness to engage on topical sensitive issues, such as inter-state border matters, is increasingly in decline while discussions of more generic issues are becoming more frequent.

Scepticism over the AU's ability to settle disputes

The AU's preference to address border disputes through negotiation and compromise, so as not to set a precedent, has also led some member states to voice scepticism over its ability to settle such disputes, especially if these have escalated into a political scuffle. Most recently, Somalia rejected Kenya's call for the AU to mediate their maritime dispute, voicing concerns about the organisation's neutrality.

Furthermore, while the AU can formulate an opinion following a technical border assessment, it currently

does not have a judicial mechanism whereby border disputes can be settled through binding decisions like those of the ICJ. Thus most countries prefer to settle their disputes through either bilateral negotiations, as Sudan and Ethiopia are currently doing, or arbitration by the ICJ or the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

The most significant challenge, however, is that while the AU has set up a mechanism to prevent conflicts between states over shared borders, this mechanism does not help to address the main drivers of borderland insecurity. These are rooted in poor governance, securitisation of borders, and the tense relationship between the centre and periphery in member states.

Most member states also lack the political will to match the regional integration rhetoric with actual implementation in their borderlands.

Drivers of instability

Africa's borderlands have been arenas of conflict and instability since independence. While the AU adopted the principle of inviolability of boundaries inherited at independence, only an estimated 35% of African borders are known to be demarcated. This has led to tensions between a number of countries.

Lack of good border governance has led to the proliferation of cross-border terrorist activities, as witnessed in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin

Such disputes linked to demarcation are worsened by natural resource exploration in borderlands and further complicated by the shifting of natural boundaries as a result of climate change impacts.

Many countries also accuse one another of interfering in each other's internal politics, often played out in bordering areas. In 2019 Rwanda and Uganda accused each other of sheltering dissidents, leading to the closure of their common border.

Armed opposition groups more often than not also originate in remote borderlands, where grievances rooted in a lack of social development and marginalisation lead to armed mobilisation against the government. When armed opposition morphs into independence movements the conflict becomes more devastating. This was seen during Africa's two longest wars fought for South Sudan's and Eritrea's independence, and can currently be witnessed in Cameroon's South and South-West regions, renamed Ambazonia by separatists.

Lack of good border governance has also led to the proliferation of cross-border terrorist activities, as witnessed in the Sahel and especially the Lake Chad Basin, with trans-border organised crime involving human, arms and drug trafficking, and smuggling of key export goods. The profits from illicit trade finance terrorist and rebel groups across the continent.

35%

AFRICAN BORDERS
DEMARCATED

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in borderlands due to long-standing conflicts escalates cross-border disputes among local communities. This sometimes prompts national security forces to intervene, which was the case in the recent Ethio-Sudan border incident that involved local Ethiopian militia and the Sudanese army.

Irredentism linked to historical claims

Another driver of insecurity in African borderlands is irredentism, caused by a demographic overlap in many countries. One of the most notable irredentist movements has been the quest for a 'greater Somalia', which remains a major issue in the Horn of Africa.

De-colonisation claims also destabilise what is regarded as the borderlands of claimed territories. These include Somaliland's border with Somalia, and Western Sahara's border with Morocco. A number of other African countries also call for the de-colonisation of their territories from Western powers.

In 2019, for example, the AU Assembly asked the AU chairperson to follow up on an ICJ Advisory Opinion that ruled for the Chagos Archipelago to be returned to Mauritius. Similarly, the United Nations General Assembly voted in 2019 for the withdrawal of the British colonial administration from the Chagos islands by November 2019.

Limits on cross-border trade

Due to the above-mentioned factors, most African borders have been securitised, limiting cross-border trade, investment in infrastructure and socio-economic development. This in turn creates a vicious cycle of marginalisation and bad governance that foments further instability.

Border closures due to border disputes or other security concerns affect local communities, which typically depend on cross-border trade. When legal trade is closed off, it is replaced by trafficking and smuggling, which is the sole source of livelihood for many communities living in the hinterlands of African states.

Border closures also negatively impact inter-African trade and hamper regional integration flagship projects such as the African Continental Free Trade Area and the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons.

Insecurity in borderlands thwarts infrastructure projects that could have led to peace and regional integration. Examples include the suspension of a road construction project between South Sudan and Uganda in 2005 because of a border dispute between local cross-border communities.

Border disputes also impede development projects in member states. Ghana's deep-water oil and gas exploration saw a decade-long delay following a boundary dispute with Côte d'Ivoire.

To overcome these challenges, African states have to fix the mismatch between their regional integration plans and the reality of continued neglect and unresolved disputes over borders.

The Chagos Archipelago

TO RETURN TO MAURITIUS

Young people take the AU's 'silencing the guns' campaign online

On Tuesday, 23 June, the PSC discussed the issue of youth, peace and security and deliberated on the adoption of two key documents – the African Union's (AU) Continental Framework for Peace and Security, including its 10-year plan (2020–2029), and the Study on the Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa. These documents both set out priorities in this important issue and have been outstanding since their validation with regional economic communities/regional mechanisms and youth groups in October 2019.

Their adoption is crucial in supporting the activities of the youth in Africa, such as their role in the AU theme for 2020, 'Silencing the guns: creating conducive conditions for Africa's development'.

Amid the global COVID-19 pandemic the rolling out of the theme has proven to be a challenge, even for young peacebuilders. Consequently, curbing the spread of the virus has hastened the shift towards digital efforts to advocate for the ending of violent conflict on the continent. The AU's peace efforts also clearly require strong information and communications technology (ICT) systems now.

Curbing the spread of the virus has hastened the shift towards digital efforts to advocate for the ending of violent conflict on the continent

During Africa Day on 25 May, the AU chairperson's special envoy on youth, Aya Chebbi, launched the 'Youth and silencing the guns' campaign. This entirely digital campaign aims to stimulate dialogue, deliberation and the wider participation of African youth and young peacebuilders on the AU theme of the year.

Online advocacy

The digital campaign has five key objectives. The first is to centre youth leadership in peace and development amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This is vital in urging the youth to use the limitations caused by the pandemic as an opportunity to be innovative in their peace and security efforts. A lot of progress had been made by the AU prior to the pandemic on Africa's youth, peace and security agenda. Now it is crucial to rally young

peacebuilders behind advocacy for the continuation of peace efforts despite COVID-19.

Secondly, the campaign aspires to nurture a movement of young pan-African leaders. Africa's youth are no strangers to movements that rally behind a common cause. In calling for a movement for youth, the campaign calls for a united voice from Africa's six regions, with young individuals who are committed to developing African youth-driven solutions to African problems.

Including young people's voices

The third objective is to ensure the meaningful participation and engagement of youth in the broader 'silencing the guns' agenda. Young people's voices are often heard, but not often acted upon. If the campaign achieves its objectives, policymakers will have ample information to support youth efforts beyond 2020.

Fourthly, the campaign aspires to bring the AU closer to young people. This has been one of the pioneering goals of the first special envoy of youth's term in office. The campaign will be instrumental in ensuring that citizens of AU member states are aware of the agenda and ways in which they can contribute to silencing the guns in their own communities. It is hoped that the campaign will motivate member states to encourage the alignment of their national youth agendas with the AU's youth, peace and security agenda.

Lastly, institutionalising intergenerational co-leadership as an approach to manage and prevent conflict has been prioritised. An intergenerational dialogue on 25 May launched this campaign and reiterated the importance of bridging the gap between generations as the continent aspires to end conflict.

This campaign is planned around a series of online conferences and webinars that create a platform for young peacebuilders to share their experiences, ongoing

work and best practices towards securing sustainable peace. Its ultimate aim is the creation of an integrated call to action for policymakers to further consider the contribution of the youth in silencing the guns. In this scenario, the policymakers are the AU member states on the PSC.

Every November the council has an open session to deliberate on youth, peace and security issues. Despite the pandemic, it is critical that the campaign helps to organise the youth in anticipation of having an audience with the PSC in November.

Disadvantages of going digital

As innovative as it may seem, going digital means millions of African youth are excluded from the debate on securing peace in their communities, as well as related efforts. Internet access is a luxury that many African youth cannot afford. Despite the growing reach of mobile phone usage, average Internet penetration in Africa stands at just 25%.

With growing inequalities on the continent, there are two camps. On one side are those 'on-line' youth who have the means to access the Internet and participate in such digital campaigns. These youth have the burden of being their peers' ambassadors in the campaign.

On the other side are those youth who are not online owing to a variety of reasons, including a lack of funds for Internet access and associated gadgets. What is unclear is whether youth who have the resources to engage in the campaign can disseminate the campaign's message to those who are unable to access it online.

A lot of progress had been made by the AU prior to the pandemic on Africa's youth, peace and security agenda

'Offline' youth have thrived on human interactions in the communities in which they operate. Undoubtedly, community engagement has been strategic in enhancing youth visibility in Africa's bid to silence the guns.

For instance, young South Sudanese peacebuilders have taken up the role of peace ambassadors

to advocate against the resurgence of violent conflict. The pandemic has already changed how they work and communicate and is so reshaping their perceptions on approaches to silencing the guns. They can no longer hold mass gatherings to disseminate peacebuilding information and interact with vulnerable citizens.

Despite the growing reach of mobile phone usage, average Internet penetration in Africa stands at just 25%

Online engagements might not be an option to enhance their operations during the pandemic as their key beneficiaries are not technologically equipped to engage remotely.

Are AU member states ready?

Going digital with the 'youth and silencing the guns campaign' will be an unprecedented continental effort to lead in innovation during a tough time for Africa's peace and security agenda. However, the weak ICT infrastructure in Africa will most likely cripple efforts such as those of the special envoy on youth.

The AU should therefore rethink the role of technology in its efforts to silence the guns. This is a technological transformation that compels the organisation to interact with innovative youth.

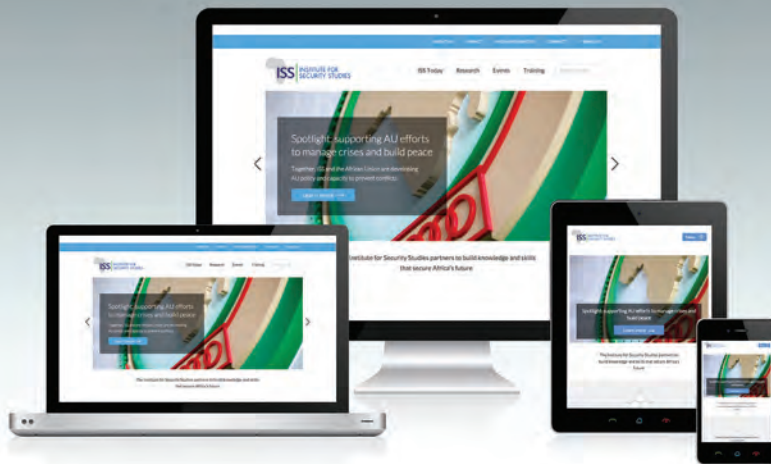
To undertake such a revolution, the AU needs to address certain key issues. In its member states there are limited policy and regulatory reforms to facilitate the extensive and affordable Internet access that online campaigns require.

Furthermore, there is a lack of finance, mentoring and training available to bolster the potential of essential digital entrepreneurs among the youth.

In addition, as indicated earlier, technology is supposed to be a tool that empowers especially those who are at the bottom of the pyramid, but the cost to access the Internet is prohibitive. Confronting member states on these three challenges is vital in ensuring that no youth are left behind as peace and security efforts go digital.

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Contributors to this issue

Mohamed Diatta, ISS Addis Ababa researcher
Liesl Louw-Vaudran, ISS senior research consultant
Andrews Attah-Asamoah, ISS senior research fellow
Shewit Woldemichael, ISS Addis Ababa researcher
Muneinazvo Kujeke, ISS Pretoria research officer

Contact

Liesl Louw-Vaudran

Consultant to the *PSC Report*
ISS Pretoria
Email: llouw@issafrica.org

Development partners



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