

Editorial Note

African Union and the Quest for Peace and Development in Africa

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Introduction

Africa continues to be beset with numerous challenges, which sometimes mask some of the progress that has been recorded in some aspects. Some of the challenges are revolve around poverty and underdevelopment. For instance, Africa has the highest rates of the world's extreme poor, with 23 of the world's 28 poorest countries, being in the continent. Using the poverty benchmark of \$1.90 per day, Africa's extreme poverty rate was in 2023 estimated to be about 35.5%, which is 6.8 times higher than the average for the rest of the world (Outreach International, 2023). In addition to excruciating poverty and its attendant consequences, Africa also has a disproportionate share of global conflicts. For instance in 2022, 58% of all state-based conflicts occurred in Africa. In fact in that year alone, there were more non-state conflicts compared to state conflicts, meaning that there were far more conflicts than suggested by this figure though many of these were non-severe when measured by battle-related deaths (Obermeier, 2023). Similarly, there has been a noticeable democratic decline in the continent – as it is the case in most parts of the world (Dean, 2024) – with more Africans living under fully or partially authoritarian states today than at most points in the last two decades (Campbell, 20240).

There is no doubt that there is an association among the three phenomena outlined above, which tend to reinforce one another, undermining or obscuring the progress being made across the continent in Human Development Index. This has led to a fundamental question of what the African Union has been doing to mitigate these challenges.

In recent years the continental body has come up with an initiative – the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which is built around structures and processes relating to the prevention, management and resolution of crises and conflicts, post-conflict reconstruction and development in the continent. The Peace and Security Council (PSC) Protocol, which was adopted in July 2002, in Durban, South Africa, and entered into force in December 2003, outlined the various components of the APSA and their respective responsibilities. The relationship between the African Union (AU), which has the primary responsibility for promoting peace, security and stability in Africa, and the Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RECs/RMs) is a key APSA component. But how effective have the various initiatives from the African Union, the RECs and various bilateral and multilateral commissions that work to actualize the goals of the continental body been? This question, broadly speaking, is what the various contributions to this issue of the journal have sought to answer.

In “Assessing the Role of the African Union in Addressing Democratic Recession in Africa”, Ajah et al interrogated the recent wave of coups in the continent and argued that the “existing continental and regional mechanisms designed to prevent unconstitutional government changes have proven largely ineffective.” They called on the African Union to critically re-appraise its convention on unconstitutional changes of government in the continent in order to address its inherent weaknesses.

Osimen, Joseph, Omidiora & Adi, in their article entitled, “Democratizing Continental Peacebuilding Architecture in Africa: Strategy for Attainment of Agenda 2063 of the African Union”, argued that the journey of the continent towards sustainable peace is “hindered by centralised, top-down peace-building frameworks that often overlook local contexts and community needs”. They contended that democratising peace-building within the African Union’s (AU) Agenda 2063 can lead to a more inclusive and effective approach, which would in turn enhance the long-term success of peace initiatives.

In “African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA): The Dichotomy of Non-Interference and Non-Indifference in Promoting Peace and Security in Africa”, Hlungwani & Muzuva examined APSA’s shift from non-interference to non-indifference and the extent to which this shift has successfully promoted peace and security on the continent. They contended that APSA’s shift to the doctrine of non-indifference is “a necessary evil”, which offers more opportunities for the protection of citizens despite its limitations.

Mkhize & Ramahuma in their contribution, “African Cultures and Values in the Mediation Process of the Russia-Ukraine War”, discussed the possible use of “African values” to end the Russo-Ukraine war. They recommended that the African Union’s mediation efforts should be grounded in “African values and cultures” and called on both the AU and the continent to strategically utilise African agency and effective diplomatic efforts in their interactions with external powers to achieve Africa’s growth and development priorities.

Makoka in his article “Africa Continental Free Trade Area as Economic Platform to Promote Intra-Regional Trade in Africa: An Afrocentric Survey” discussed the opportunities offered by AfCFTA to boost intra African trade and development. He contended that the future of Africa’s economic development depends on the Unity of African economies.

In “Regional Security Cooperation for Peace, Stability and Security: The ECOWAS Experience”, Megwalu & Garba examine the multidimensional security challenges among members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which have made the region a hotspot for criminality driven by the activities of non-state armed groups. They interrogated the factors “accelerating or influencing the security dynamics of the region and how they combine to cause societal stress in which criminal anarchy portends a strategic threat” and called for necessary of the sub-regional organization to re-image itself.

Okunade in “Paradiplomacy in West Africa: Exploring the Role of Subnational Governments toward Regional Integration and Development”, discussed the policies championed by ECOWAS in its drive for regional integration, noting that such policies include the introduction of the ECOWAS free movement protocol and the ECOWAS passport, which are all geared towards creating “Community Citizenship” and facilitating trade and mobility between member states, to fast-track integration that will culminate into wide-spread development in West Africa. He argued that to implement these policies,

borderlands and subnational governments are crucial actors in the process but that there have been crucial gaps in the literature of regional integration in the sub-region. He argued that his paper is meant to fill that gap.

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