



Celebrating 25 years of the Training for Peace programme

The African Union's Civilian Strategic Support Group



*Dr Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, Anab Ovidie Grand
and Mariana Llorens Zabala*

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Summary

Since 2006, the African Union has played an active role in strengthening civilian engagement across its Peace Support Operations (PSOs) through the development of the Policy Framework for the Civilian Dimension of the African Standby Force in 2006 and the subsequent formation of the Civilian Strategic Support Group (CSSG) in 2015. This policy brief examines the development of the CSSG and its efforts to date, and offers an overview on how and why the civilian component should be further enhanced within future AU PSOs.

Key findings

- The CSSG has been vital in promoting a common understanding of the roles, functions and responsibilities of civilian personnel within AU PSOs.
- The CSSG has acted as a platform to discuss major concerns such as the number of civilians deployed; recruitment and rotating staff; training and capacity-building; and integration/coordination with other mission components.

Recommendations

Smaller-scale and political missions might become the new standard due, in part, to financial costs, for which special attention should be placed on how the AU integrates the civilian dimension within future PSOs. The AU should consider the following as part of future African-led missions:

- Engage more in the continuation and development of the CSSG, including greater buy-in from the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security.
- The RECs/RMs need to be better represented at the levels of decision-making and planning to ensure further relevant civilian inputs for PSOs.
- Assess whether the AU has the appropriate and sufficient capabilities to support civilian staff in challenging times.
- Examine the performance in the areas of human rights, civil affairs, political affairs and public information based on the UN's Comprehensive Performance Assessment System.
- Consider the various evolving models of deployment to ensure capability and deployability match in the field.

Introduction¹

As part of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) — established almost 20 years ago— the African Union (AU) has played an active role in solving and responding to conflict across the continent.² The AU's strategic position in dealing with peace and security matters in Africa has included the deployment of eight peace support operations (PSOs) of its own, namely the African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB); the African-led International Support Mission in Central Africa (MISCA); its missions in the Comoros (AU Mission for Support to the Elections in the Comoros (AMISEC) and the African Union Electoral and Security Assistance Mission to the Comoros [MAES]), the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS I and II).³

The AU's strategic role in the continent's peace and security has also included supporting ad hoc regional security coalitions, such as the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA) and the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram.⁴

These peace operations and ad hoc regional security initiatives have demonstrated the AU's ability to develop robust capabilities regarding civilian capacity within PSOs. Furthermore, with support from international partners, the AU has invested in establishing and developing the concept and modalities of the African Standby Force (ASF) — which features as a component of APSA—over the last two decades.⁵

In 2006, the AU began to develop a Civilian Dimensions Policy Framework to strengthen the multidimensionality of the ASF.⁶ The framework

was approved in 2008 and has since been used to guide the engagement of civilians across the AU's PSOs. The framework was a response to the lack of strategic guidance on the development of the civilian dimension. An informal Civilian Focal Point Group was established in 2010 to support and enhance the work of civilians at the AU Commission (AUC) and the Planning Elements (PLANELMs) of the regional economic communities and regional mechanisms (RECs/RMs). The objective was to ensure that the civilian component received the same amount of attention as the military component, particularly in the operationalisation of the ASF. It was later followed by the formation of a formal Civilian Strategic Support Group (CSSG) in 2015.

In this policy brief, the authors highlight the development of the CSSG and its efforts to date. Next, the brief examines how and why the civilian component should be further enhanced within AU PSOs.

The support to the civilian component

The early focus of the ASF was centred around developing the military component. Around 2006, the focus later shifted to include the police and civilian components.⁷ The initial development of the civilian component of the ASF fell short in a number of areas. A key shortfall was the lack of staffing of civilians within the ASF, which slowed down the development of the civilian component. Over time, it became evident that a support mechanism or group was needed for civilian planners to share information, knowledge, lessons learned, and expertise.⁸

In 2010, a Civilian Focal Point Group was established to address these shortfalls and develop the annual joint work plans of the Civilian Component of the AU and the RECs/RMs to ensure the development of a multidimensional ASF. The group met informally to discuss challenges and issues that civilian personnel were experiencing as part of their support to AU PSOs.⁹ The Civilian Focal Point Group included civilian planners and experts from various African institutions, African Training Centres of Excellence (TCEs) and member states. Initially, the focus was on the staff's

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critical requirements at the continental and regional planning levels.

During its early years, most of the group's work was significantly complemented and supported by the various TCEs that formed part of the group and its wider network.

In the early stages, small victories were achieved. This included helping to foster good working connections between the AU and RECs/RMs, which later helped support the various regional entities with resource mobilisation efforts. These efforts helped to create a safe environment for the discussion of critical matters and challenges facing civilian planners in PSOs. Among these were lessons shared; agreeing on the priorities for the civilian component in PSOs; and outlining work plans for civilians in PSOs. The group also helped to foster strong bilateral connections among colleagues working within the same field across the various missions.

Developing the CSSG

In 2013, the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government (HoSG) requested a review of the ASF to assess the operational readiness of the force and its Rapid Deployment Capabilities (RDC). The review, known as the Gambari Report, found that the military component of the ASF was the most advanced, and that the police and civilian components were still lagging with respect to capacity, configuration and qualifications.¹⁰ The report called for further engagement to achieve *'... clearer articulation of the comparative advantage and contribution of civilians in African Union-led missions, and in particular, "high-intensity" operations'*.

Within the AU, bureaucratic and political impetus for the civilian dimension was limited.

As such, new approaches to enhance the civilian component were discussed at various meetings, based on recommendations in the Gambari Report.¹¹ These deliberations helped to crystallise the idea of formalising a dedicated support group, and in 2015, at a meeting hosted by the Zambian government, it was suggested to formalise the Civilian Focal Point Group structure through the CSSG.¹² The final decision to establish the CSSG was taken at the 8th Meeting of the Specialised Technical Committee on Defence Safety and Security (STCDSS) in Zimbabwe, from 13 to 15 May 2015. The CSSG was subsequently launched on 21 October 2016 in Ethiopia.¹³

The CSSG was created specifically to address the shortfalls of the civilian component, and assist the AU with developing its civilian capacity. Thus, the CSSG would seek to promote a common understanding of the roles, functions and responsibilities of civilian personnel in AU PSOs.¹⁴ The group also aims to facilitate member states' and technical support for the development of the civilian dimension of African PSOs, and to provide technical advisory and coordination support on civilian-related issues within AU PSOs.¹⁵

The CSSG drew inspiration from the Police Strategic Support Group (PSSG), a group created to develop the police component in PSOs and create synergies between the AUC, the REC/RMs and the mission levels.¹⁶

The processes of deploying civilians — specifically in the areas of administration, capacity building and training — were being developed in line with the African Standby Capacity (ASC) by designated officers within the Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD). The CSSG assisted in addressing and mitigating any challenges as they arose.

In 2017, experts working on the CSSG recommended enhancing Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) in multiple areas. This included enhancing the role of individuals and entities in conducting research on the civilian component; expanding the mandate of the CSSG to play a role in advocacy; and providing periodic guidance to the ASF continental and regional planning elements. The experts recommended strengthening the structure and organs of the AU to, among others, ensure the involvement of AUC departments and divisions.¹⁷

The CSSG has provided a platform for discussions between experts working on civilian capacities, the AU and RECs/RMs. In this context, there has been a particular focus on bringing up issues or challenges that the RECs and AU are facing in terms of the civilian capacity. The CSSG has also assisted with providing inputs for various policies, such as including language on civilians in the development of the PSO doctrine and the ASF concept.¹⁸ Furthermore, the CSSG has acted as a platform where RECs, missions and troop contributing countries have been able to raise concerns. These include matters such as the incoherence between the mandated number of civilians in a mission and the actual number of civilians deployed, which affects the engagement of the civilian component; the issue of rotating staff without capturing lessons learnt or knowledge generated; and the lack of up-to-date trainings to align with situations that are constantly evolving.

Since 2017, multiple suggestions for improvement have been brought forward in the yearly CSSG coordination meetings. These have included improving training policies, revisions of staff rules and regulations, and ways to enhance communication, collaboration and coordination on civilian issues between strategic HQ and missions. Yet progress has been slow.

In this context, four main areas have emerged as key thematic issues in recent CSSG discussions:¹⁹

1. **Recruitment and rostering issues.** Discussions in this regard included enhancing the role of civilians in PSOs via recruitment from the ASC civilian roster; the

The CSSG has also assisted with providing inputs for various policies.



secondment of officers by member states; and direct recruitment from member states. Whether recruitment is being carried out in a timely manner has also been raised during the CSSG meetings. It was suggested that the Staff Rules and Regulations should revise the timeliness of recruitment for further civilian enhancement.

2. **Training and capacity building.** There has been consistent conversation between PSOD and training centres on the issue of training civilians. Discussions indicated that TCEs have the capacity to train AU civilian, military and police personnel in order to meet capacity needs, and have been doing so until now. They should, therefore, continue to support training and capacity building. Funding constraints were identified as an impediment to conducting training activities, so the need for the redistribution of funding was also raised by CSSG convenors. Leveraging technological advances has also helped to enhance opportunities for training activities. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated efforts to adapt trainings using online learning platforms.
3. **Civilian roles in the field.** Even though the civilian component has been integrated into AU PSOs, it still operates at a strength lower than authorised, and struggles to occupy a space that is equal to that of the military and police components. For example, in the case of AMISOM, 70 civilian personnel were authorised to be deployed, but only 47 civilians had been recruited and deployed, as of 2020.²⁰ There is also an on-going discussion on the type of roles and engagements that civilians can have in AU-mandated and AU-authorised missions. Therefore, there is a need to operationally distinguish the civilian role in the different type of missions. The criteria for what

constitutes a civilian has also featured in discussions. This included, for example, whether retired military personnel can be considered as civilian personnel; or whether their roles are unique to civilian roles. This matter can affect the intervention of civilians and should be resolved.

4. **Integration/coordination with other mission components.** There has been some evolution with regard to civilian deployment in AMISOM, AFISMA and MISCA. However, experience shows that the military component still enjoys greater prominence than the police and civilian components. It has therefore been emphasised that it is important to provide further guidance on the coordination of the three components across the mission areas of responsibility.

Enhancing the civilian component of AU PSOs

The last two decades have seen a marked decrease in the number of large-scale multilateral peace operations across the globe.²¹ This growing trend is shifting away from large-scale PSOs to more political missions – particularly in relation to the UN missions²² – and seems to be focused on a reluctance to deploy large-scale PSOs due, in part, to financial costs.²³ Considerable funding is required for AU PSOs. Member states and the AU have not funded these PSOs on their own, but benefit from the significant support of international partners. It is also unlikely that the AU will be able to finance these in the long-term. Future PSOs are therefore likely to be composed of smaller missions – except in situations where a security guarantee is vital.²⁴ This new era of peace support will make responses to insecurity and conflict more specialised and area specific. Political missions might be the new standard

due to financial constraints, and large-scale PSOs might only be deployed in exceptional cases.

Changes in the format and deployment of peace support will also have implications for African PSOs and the civilian dimension of all future AU missions. It is therefore crucial to understand the impact that these changes will have on the civilian dimensions of AU PSOs; and to recognise how the AU integrates this functionality within African-led missions in the future. The functionality within PSOs shifts the focus from how individual civilians are trained, deployed and positioned, to also include the process of engaging these civilian functions and expertise to achieve the overall mission objectives, and to ensure that the military, civilian and police components work together.²⁵

While the AU has deployed extensively — at least in relative terms — and concerns itself with real-time operational issues at the regional level, civilian personnel will still face fundamental challenges. The AU should consider the following as part of future African-led missions:

- The political leadership at the AUC and the wider AU needs to be more involved in the continuation and development of the CSSG, including greater buy-in from the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security and the deputies;
- The RECs/RMs must be better represented at the decision-making levels in the planning of regional operations in civilian roles,²⁶ and at the AUC headquarters, to ensure relevant civilian inputs form part of the planning stages of a PSO.
- Whether the AU has appropriate and sufficient capabilities in the field must be assessed, including a possible need for alternative capabilities. For example, a starting point might be to explore new ways of working to sustain and support staff during challenging times.
- An in-depth look is needed to examine how performance can be enhanced by considering the UN's Comprehensive Performance Assessment System as a guidance tool for assessing how the AU works in the areas of human rights, civil affairs, political affairs and public information.

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- Finally, consideration should be given to deployment models, which over time have evolved but may not fully reflect the expected outcome. This leaves a mismatch between developing capability, and deploying and utilising capacity in the field.

The CSSG should be leveraged to promote greater coordination and formulate coherent policies across the spectrum. This includes providing advice to scale up political principles to inform decision-making, planning and training. Ensuring that this happens will be valuable for developing the group in the future.

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The Training for Peace (TfP) Programme has accompanied the CSSG and supported the process of developing the civilian dimension in AU PSOs. Participating in activities such as the CSSG meetings is in line with strategic goal of the TfP Programme of strengthening the AUC and regional capacity to plan, manage and implement PSOs on the continent through the enhancement of the ASF civilian component.

Notes

- 1 This policy paper is based on analysis conducted on the AU Civilian Strategic Support Group.
- 2 De Coning, C., Limo, I., Machakaire, J., and Okeke, J. M. (2017). The Role of the Civilian Component in African Union Peace Support Operations. In F. Vrey, & T. Mandrup, *The African Standby Force*. African Sun MeDIA.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 De Coning, C., Tchier, A., and Ovidie Grand, A. (2021). Understanding Ad-Hoc Security Initiatives in Africa. Training for Peace Policy Brief. https://cdn.trainingforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/20210817124121/TfP_ASI_Policy-Brief_v7-for-web.pdf.
- 5 The ASF is a multidimensional tool comprised of civilian, military, and police components. Any multidimensional deployment requires the integration and cooperation of these three elements.
- 6 Policy Framework for the Civilian Dimension of the African Standby Force (2006). <file:///Users/mllorens.zabala/Downloads/ACCORD-Policy-Framework-Civilian-Dimension-ASF.pdf>.
- 7 Akpasom, Y. (2016). What roles for the civilian and police dimension in African peace operations? In C. de Coning, J. Karlsrud, and L. Gelot, *The Future of African Peace Operations*. Zed Books.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Report of the Independent Panel of Experts' Assessment of the African Standby Force (2013). <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/report-independent-panel-of-experts-assessment-of-the-asf-latest.pdf>.
- 11 De Coning, C., Limo, I., Machakaire, J., and Okeke, J. M. (2017). The Role of the Civilian Component in African Union Peace Support Operations. In F. Vrey, & T. Mandrup, *The African Standby Force*. African Sun MeDIA.
- 12 De Coning et al. (2017).
- 13 Term of Reference, the Civilian Strategic Support Group (2016). <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/draft-clean-cssg-tor-24.6.2016-sb.pdf>.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 De Coning et al. (2017).
- 16 CSSG Meeting 2017.
- 17 De Coning et al. (2017); CSSG meeting in 2017.
- 18 Policy Framework for the Civilian Dimension of the African Standby Force (2006). <file:///Users/mllorens.zabala/Downloads/ACCORD-Policy-Framework-Civilian-Dimension-ASF.pdf>.
- 19 CSSG Meeting Reports, 2018 and 2019.
- 20 CSSG Meeting 2019.
- 21 SIPRI (2022) Multilateral peace operations in 2021: Developments and trends. Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2022/multilateral-peace-operations-2021-developments-and-trends#:~:text=Although%20the%20mission's%20authorized%20level,to%20consist%20of%201077%20personnel>.
- 22 Dorussen, Han (2020) UN: political missions are gradually replacing peacekeeping – why that's dangerous. *The Conversation*. Available at <https://theconversation.com/un-political-missions-are-gradually-replacing-peacekeeping-why-thats-dangerous-145886>.

- 23 Gramer, Robbie & Lynch, Colum (2018) Trump Stealthily Seeks to Choke Off Funding to U.N. Programs. *Foreign Policy*. Available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/02/trump-stealthily-seeks-to-choke-off-funding-to-un-programs/>.
- 24 De Coning, C., Gelot, L. & Karlsrud, J. (2016) *The Future of African Peace Operations: From the Janjaweed to Boko Haram*. Zedd Books: London
- 25 From a seminar on the Civilian Strategic Support Group. As stated by Cedric de Coning.
- 26 For example, regional civilian staff could have played more of a role in the mission The African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA); Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG) and The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Preventive Mission in the Kingdom of Lesotho (SAPMIL) was officially launched by the Representative of the Chairperson of Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, Admiral Gasper Rufino on 2 December 2017.



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About the authors

Dr Andrew E. Yaw Tchie is a Senior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and manages the Training for Peace Programme at NUPI. He is a visiting Professor at the University of Buckingham, a visiting Senior Researcher at King's College London and an Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute. He has lived, conducted field research and shorter missions to Botswana, Ghana, India, Kenya, Mauritius, Nepal, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda. He tweets at @DrATchie

Anab Ovidie Grand is a former Junior Research Fellow with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) where she worked on the Training for Peace programme, the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network and the Climate-related Peace and Security Risks project. Anab is a Junior Professional Officer (Norway) currently serving as a Policy Analyst on Climate and Security Risk with UNDP's Crisis Bureau. She tweets at @AnabGrand.

Mariana Llorens Zabala is a Junior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), working with the Training for Peace (TfP) Programme and the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) at NUPI. She holds two master's degrees in Human Rights Law and Advanced Studies of Terrorism. Her research focus includes the work of the African Union, peace operations and security issues related to terrorism and terrorist groups.

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