



# Pathways to smarter **partnerships**

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*Ambassador Bankole Adeoye and other critical voices reflect on the ‘imperative of collaborative approaches’ in achieving greater peace, security and democracy.*

In recent months and years, Africa has grappled with the effects of global challenges like climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and increasingly sophisticated transnational threats. Similar trends are seen at the regional, national and local levels. In August 2021, the peaceful transfer of power in Zambia signalled a celebratory moment. Yet elsewhere on the continent, conflicts have persisted, and unconstitutional changes of government in Mali, Guinea and Sudan have created a stark reminder of the fragility of Africa’s democratic gains. The continent’s challenges are particularly visible at this intersection between governance, peace and security. It is also precisely at this nexus where smart and innovative partnerships with the African Union (AU) are more critical than ever.

The need for partnerships that draw on the past, while looking to the future through an innovative lens, was one of the themes discussed at a closed,

online roundtable hosted by the Training for Peace (TfP) Programme in September. Titled *Partnering to build synergy for a more peaceful, secure and democratic Africa*, the event saw a number of influential voices candidly reflect on how support organisations can add greater value to the efforts of the African Union.

‘We have a lot to learn. I am a firm believer in lesson learning,’ said Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner of the AU’s recently formed Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS). Commissioner Bankole reflected on the ‘inherent interlinkages between good governance, peace and security,’ and referred to the ‘imperative of collaborative approaches’ in this context. ‘We live in a truly interconnected world. That’s why we have to work together,’ he said, calling on participants to critically reflect on the need to strengthen the interface between peace and security and political governance

and democracy. 'This interface can never be overemphasised. That is why we need to work together, through partnership support, to strengthen what we do.'

'It is only when partnerships are inclusive, responsive, smart and driven by mutual principles that we'll see a difference. Our partners have different strengths, but we're united in a common purpose: to work, guide and support our collective resolve for improved governance, peace and security on our continent,' the commissioner added. 'By applying a strategic approach to all our partnerships, we will create a unity of focus and ensure we deliver as one.' The formation of communities of practice was emphasised as a modality that can drive innovative partnerships, and help to enhance how policy is both shaped and implemented.

Participants agreed on the need for nimble and flexible partnerships, and the importance of a common purpose in ensuring sufficient clarity, cooperation and collaboration. These objectives are made explicit in the Priority Action Plan that identifies the strategic pillars of Bankole's department. A pillar titled 'Inclusive and Smart Partnerships for Human Security' consciously promotes efforts to reinvigorate 'consultations, communication and coordination' with diverse actors.

This encourages a 'whole-of-system' approach which galvanises collective action towards the implementation, and strengthens the connections between, the AU's most important frameworks for peace, security and governance – namely the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and

the African Governance Architecture (AGA) – while complementing the functions of the Peace and Security Council (PSC).

In deliberating on the second pillar of the Priority Action Plan, the commissioner emphasised the need for preventative approaches. 'We have to remain committed to flexible systems to promote adequate responsiveness to reducing and preventing conflict, and ensure that mediation plays a very active role.'

The need for support that builds and boosts capacity on the continent – rather than replacing capacity, and then engendering dependency – was also identified as critical in the formation of effective partnerships. In this context, the need for support in building systems that can boost institutional capacity development was also discussed.

This forms part of a shift that prioritises the need for solutions to originate from, and be effected by, local actors. 'It is only when effective governance is on the rise that we can prevent conflict and sustain peace on our continent. Local ownership and leadership is fundamental, and we believe our partners will support us,' said the commissioner.

The PAPS Department's prioritisation of partnerships is welcomed by the TfP Programme. 'The TfP's history of supporting the AU spans more than 25 years,' says Dr Linda Darkwa, Coordinator of the TfP Secretariat. 'During this time, the TfP has developed considerable experience as a catalyst, convenor and enabler in support of the AU's vision and mandate. We look forward to leveraging this critical opportunity with the new PAPS Department towards even greater impact.'