

Consolidating African-led Peacebuilding Efforts



Dr. Andrew E. Yaw Tchie

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Executive summary

While the United Nations (UN) holds the primary responsibility for securing global peace, it increasingly emphasises the importance of partnerships with regional organisations. In practice, this means the UN often engages only once peace has been brokered. The wider international community looks to leading regional organisations, such as the African Union (AU) in the case of Africa, to take the lead in peacebuilding.

As such, the AU has emerged as a key actor — mobilising international support for peacebuilding across the continent, while also driving the development of significant localised initiatives and anchoring these in state institutions towards advancing peace and stability. However, in persistent, violent conflicts, peacebuilding efforts often take a backseat. Stabilisation frequently takes centre stage, while policymakers focus on immediate humanitarian priorities and the prevention of further violence. As a result, peacebuilding in Africa is rarely uniform across states. It is often concentrated in capitals and urban areas, producing long-term effects that may exacerbate tensions and inadvertently reinforce the very disparities that initially sparked conflict.

Peacebuilding is not a neutral process. It can maintain and entrench existing social structures, framing democracy as the sole driver of change while overlooking peacebuilding as a space of political contestation, negotiation and tension, and one that confers or denies legitimacy.

This study examines African-led peacebuilding efforts that seek to address conflicts' structural contradictions and root causes. It calls for a rethink of regional organisations' approaches to peacebuilding in complex stabilisation environments, advocating for a more adaptive regional peacebuilding strategy that acknowledges its deep interlinkages with stabilisation.

Key findings

- While peacekeeping in Africa has evolved, institutions such as the African Union (AU) should adopt a comprehensive approach that draws on and supports nationally and locally led peacebuilding approaches;
- Rethinking peacebuilding in Africa is crucial. A broader, more holistic and interconnected approach is needed to tackle the continent's multifaceted challenges;
- Peacebuilding at the regional levels must better connect with efforts at the national and local levels, building stronger bridges across governance tiers;
- Current thinking on peacebuilding should expand to include stabilisation contexts, climate, peace and security, while responding to emerging threats and strengthening coherence.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen regional collaboration** by prioritising local ownership and addressing the root causes of conflict. This requires a bold commitment to enhancing national ownership, fostering inclusivity and securing sustainable financing for impactful peacebuilding initiatives.
2. **Develop locally owned, context-specific peacebuilding strategies** that are fully integrated into national development plans. These strategies should be supported by the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) through comprehensive and holistic frameworks that inspire collaboration and sustained progress.
3. **Champion the inclusion of women, youth and marginalised groups** in peacebuilding processes. By implementing mechanisms such as quotas and fostering institutional integration, we can ensure that diverse voices are not just heard but are actively shaping the future of peace.
4. **Empowering communities through national ownership and local engagement.** A holistic approach is needed — one that tackles root causes of conflict and builds resilience while addressing emerging threats, such as climate change.
5. **Secure predictable and adequate funding for peacebuilding** to become a sustainable reality, including through innovative mechanisms such as partnerships with the private sector and international financial institutions.
6. **Harmonise governance and peacebuilding frameworks** to enhance conflict prevention and management. By prioritising state-building and institution-building, we can turn the tide toward effective and meaningful peacebuilding efforts that resonate with the aspirations of all people.

Introduction

Peacebuilding became popular after 1992, when then-United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali presented his report, *An Agenda for Peace*.¹ In the report, Boutros-Ghali defines peacebuilding as a range of activities meant to identify and support structures that will strengthen and solidify peace, and avoid relapse into conflict. For the UN, peacebuilding activities and approaches are distinct from peacemaking and peacekeeping.² The term ‘peacebuilding’ was coined by Johan Galtung, who described it as “approaches to peace” in his 1976 research.³ Together, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding constitute a general theory of achieving or maintaining peace. As Mialletal and others noted: “With reference to the conflict triangle, it can be suggested that peacemaking aims to change the attitudes of the main protagonists, peacekeeping lowers the level of destructive behaviour, and peacebuilding tries to overcome the contradictions which lie at the root of the conflict.”⁴

Peacebuilding can be understood through diverse lenses, approaches and techniques. These include peacebuilding through indigenous thinking;⁵ arts and music; dialogue and reconciliation; sports; and nonviolence education.⁶ Each offers unique significance and challenges.⁷ As the term ‘peacebuilding’ has evolved, so too has its characterisation. For example, experts like Schirch argue that peacebuilding seeks to “prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence in all forms, even structural violence”, especially in contexts which have not yet led to massive civil unrest.⁸ Another layer is so-called ‘strategic peacebuilding’, which recognises the complexity of the tasks required to build peace. Peacebuilding is strategic when resources, actors and approaches are coordinated to accomplish multiple goals and address multiple issues over an extended period. It also calls for multiple, “well-coordinated approaches to transform violence and conflict into more sustainable, peaceful relationships and structures”.⁹ Consequently, peacebuilding can be seen as an important and necessary tool for re-establishing security and stability and initiating nation-building processes during and after prolonged conflicts.

Peacebuilding is strategic when resources, actors and approaches are coordinated to accomplish multiple goals and address multiple issues over an extended period

Over the past three decades, peacebuilding efforts have been driven by political interests, strategic objectives, humanitarian concerns and, more recently, disproportionate focus on security means (stabilisation efforts). Interventions are often based on a mix of moral imperatives and strategic calculations. For instance, humanitarian needs often justify interventions — such as addressing mass atrocities or preventing large-scale displacement.¹⁰ The reasons for continuing or terminating peacebuilding efforts can shift dramatically as conflicts evolve. Political changes, evolving strategic priorities and the emergence of new humanitarian crises often influence decision-making. Examples include changes in the political landscape of donor countries or the strategic reorientation of regional powers, which can lead to support being recalibrated or withdrawn.¹¹ The effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts is frequently reassessed based on their impact on conflict resolution and stability.¹²

Nonetheless, the focus on such variables has significantly influenced the trajectory of various conflicts as external actors bring their own set of motivations to the table,¹³ and eventually cease their peacebuilding efforts. This adds levels of complexity, creating new dynamics that in turn impact actors' incentives. Motivations may include geopolitical ambitions, economic investments and regional stability. The involvement of external actors often introduces a discrete set of priorities and approaches, reflecting a broader spectrum of international interests and strategies — and often also pitting Western actors against non-Western players like China and Russia. On the ground, the dichotomy of 'Western vs. non-Western' involvement can either promote or undermine alignment between international

actors' rationales. It has significant implications for the needs of affected populations or local communities, and may serve to undermine the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts.¹⁴ For example, strategies that do not consider local contexts, or are driven primarily by external interests, may fail to address the root causes of conflict or could even exacerbate existing tensions.¹⁵

These challenges have led scholars to recognise that peacebuilding is no longer to be 'imposed' by a central state. Studies of wartime order-making have shown that the agency of an array of local actors has to be recognised if this intricate web of relationships is to be reshaped in the ways intended.¹⁶

Recent work by De Coning emphasises the necessity of understanding the complexity of the local environment and identifying adaptive peacebuilding approaches that include diverse stakeholders within an evolving context.¹⁷ International actors must comprehend these challenges to peacebuilding and support communities' initiatives and organic bottom-up approaches — all while considering the local context. This approach has become known as 'adaptive peacebuilding', where the societies and communities intended to benefit from a conflict resolution or peacebuilding intervention should be fully involved in all aspects of the initiative.

Adaptive peacebuilding encompasses six core principles for managing complexity. First, the actions intended to ensure the sustainability of a specific peace process must be context- and time-specific, emerging from a process that engages the societies themselves. Second, adaptive peacebuilding is goal-oriented or problem-solving. This makes it essential to work

with the local society to clearly identify what the peacebuilding project should aim to achieve. Third, adaptive peacebuilding remains agnostic about the methods used to pursue its goals. However, it remains founded on a specific methodology in its focus on an adaptive approach, referring to participatory processes that facilitate a goal-oriented outcome. Fourth is variety: a key element of the adaptive approach. Given the uncertainty of outcomes, it is necessary to consider various options across a spectrum of probabilities. Fifth is feedback, which should be carefully evaluated to ascertain which actions yield the most positive impact. Adaptive peacebuilding relies on participatory decision-making that discards ineffective or harmful actions, while promising interventions can be further adapted or scaled for greater impact. At a strategic level, this means revisiting assumptions and adjusting plans in response to shifting dynamics. Sixth, adaptive peacebuilding is an ongoing, iterative process. It recognises that in highly complex contexts, assessments fast lose relevance as new dynamics emerge. Finally, this approach also calls for stronger support and funding in capacity, coordination and the essential resources that communities require, while minimising external influence and control over processes and programmes.

Adaptive peacebuilding relies on participatory decision-making that discards ineffective or harmful actions, while promising interventions can be further adapted or scaled for greater impact

This report argues that while peacebuilding in Africa is not new — rooted in the cradle of the continent's history — there is a need to adopt a more holistic approach that strengthens Africa-led peacebuilding in stabilisation contexts. The report explores how African-led peacebuilding can evolve by drawing on innovative strategies to address both the root causes and contradictions of conflict across diverse settings.

Using the adaptive peacebuilding model, the report calls for a rethink of how regional organisations such as the African Union understand and approach peacebuilding in complex stabilisation environments. It proposes a new framework for institutions such as the African Union (AU) to approach peacebuilding in these contexts.

The evolution of peacebuilding from the OAU to the AU

From the OAU to the AU, regional organisations have become central to peacebuilding in Africa and an integral part of the

international peacebuilding system. As the context has shifted, the AU's approach has evolved — drawing on lessons from the OAU and integrating UN-driven ideas to promote a more comprehensive approach to peace and development. This has resulted in a distinct peacebuilding strategy.¹⁸

Over time, growing international engagement — from the UN, AU, RECs, political groupings and other members of the international community — has shaped peacebuilding in Africa. Article 52(1), Chapter VIII of the UN Charter acknowledges the value, role and legitimacy of regional entities in maintaining international peace and security.¹⁹ However, these arrangements and their activities are expected to align with UN principles and priorities. The Charter encourages regional institutions to pursue peaceful solutions to conflicts. Thus, in close collaboration with the UN and other entities, the AU is well positioned to mediate, provide political and analytical support, and promote common peacebuilding frameworks.

The Charter encourages regional institutions to pursue peaceful solutions to conflicts

Recognising its unique contribution to peacebuilding in Africa, the AU developed its Common African Position (CAP) on the post-2015 development agenda in 2015. This was grounded in the belief that achieving the vision of Agenda 2063 requires transformation in key Pan-African priority areas.

The AU CAP was preceded by the AU's 2006 Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy, adopted at the Banjul Summit. The PCRD policy was developed to help African countries prevent the recurrence of conflict and support peacebuilding. Its adoption was endorsed both in the literature and subsequent practice, and it remains the AU's principal policy on peacebuilding, implemented through the Centre of Excellence in Cairo.²⁰ Through the CAP, the AU has also continued to contribute strategic insights to the UN peacebuilding architecture review over the last decade.²¹

The PCRD policy was developed to help African countries prevent the recurrence of conflict and support peacebuilding

Institutional peacebuilding efforts have been further strengthened by the Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, signed in 2017.²² These efforts also encompass the AU-UN Framework for implementing Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, signed

in 2018.²³ The frameworks establish a strategic foundation for peacebuilding, anchored in balancing continental leadership with regional responsibility for peace.

Institutional efforts in peacebuilding

The AU's African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is built on five key pillars: the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the African Standby Force and the Peace Fund. Two of these play a central role in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.

The first is PSC, which promotes peace, security and stability across the continent. Its mandate includes anticipating conflicts, preventative diplomacy and facilitating peace through mediation and conciliation. It is also tasked with peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction, humanitarian initiatives and disaster management. The second is CEWS, which supports early conflict detection and prevention.²⁴ These mechanisms are reinforced by Article 3 of the AU Constitutive Act, which commits to "promote peace, security, and stability on the continent",²⁵ and are complemented by initiatives such as the African Solidarity Initiative (ASI) and the African Peace Fund.²⁶

Additionally, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has become a key AU initiative to confront the socio-economic and political challenges that fuel conflict and instability. NEPAD is instrumental in supporting post-conflict reconstruction and plays a crucial role in mobilising resources for the AU Peace Fund, ensuring that nations can rebuild and thrive. It also serves as the implementing arm of the development strategy of the AU's Agenda 2063.²⁷ Additionally, the AU works closely with RECs, drawing on their local

knowledge and expertise to address peace and security matters in conflict-affected regions. At the continental level, institutions such as the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) contribute invaluable policy initiatives and resources that strengthen Africa's peacebuilding capacity. These partnerships are essential for creating a stable and prosperous future for the continent.

At its 35th Ordinary Session,²⁸ the AU Assembly and PSC called for an urgent review of the 2006 PCRD policy to re-align and adapt with Africa's evolving peace and security landscape.²⁹ The 1047th PSC session underscored the need to expand the scope of AU PCRD efforts. This included incorporating a peacebuilding dimension and addressing the full conflict cycle — pre-conflict, during conflict and post-conflict. It was noted that: "... contemporary conflicts in Africa exhibit a non-linear nature, requiring engagements and interventions throughout a peace continuum for 'dynamic, sufficient and timely responses at the various stages of conflict.'"³⁰

In line with the AU's position on peacebuilding, the 899th Meeting of the PSC, convened in Luanda, Angola, on 5 December 2019, called on the AU Commission to urgently develop a draft CAP ahead of the 2020 UN Peacebuilding Architecture review. As with the Cairo Mechanism — key in shaping norms for intervention in domestic affairs — the Lomé Declaration of 2000 introduced a crucial principle against unconstitutional changes in government. These principles are solidified in the 2002 African Union Constitutive Act, which formalised the AU's roles in peace and post-conflict reconstruction, strengthening nations' pursuit of stability and democratic governance.³¹

At its 1188th session on 29 November 2023, the AU PSC took a significant step in advancing PCRD. The PSC strongly urged the AU Commission to accelerate the review of the AU PCRD Policy and promptly present a revised draft for PSC consideration. This call followed valuable insights gathered during the review processes held in Accra (September 2022) and Cairo (May/June 2023), aiming to better integrate AU peacebuilding efforts with evolving APSA and African Governance Architecture (AGA) frameworks.

At its 1198th session, the AU PSC considered the AU PCRD Policy and acknowledged the efforts of Egypt, as AU Champion for PCRD, and Angola, as Champion of the Africa Day of Peace and Reconciliation. These contributions are reflected in the establishment of the AU PCRD Centre in Cairo³³ and the launch of a Working Group on AU PCRD, both designed to strengthen the AU's peacebuilding and PCRD architecture.³⁴ The PSC also noted progress toward institutionalising the annual joint consultative meetings with the UN's Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), as agreed at the sixth Informal Joint Annual Consultative Meeting held in Addis Ababa on 13 November 2023.

The CAP review, thus, became essential for advancing Agenda 2063, particularly its flagship initiative, Silencing the Guns in Africa. It reaffirms Africa's growing role as a key player in global peacebuilding. Importantly, it aligns with the broader international shift towards prevention and integration in peacebuilding — a global paradigm shift articulated in UN Secretary-General António Guterres's *New Agenda for Peace*.³⁵

Regional and local responses to peacebuilding in Africa

The establishment of the UN PBC in 2006, along with related mechanisms aimed at ensuring peace in post-conflict countries,³⁶ saw the PBC become mandated to coordinate actors in the peacebuilding process, mobilise resources, develop best practices for post-conflict recovery and lay the foundation for sustainable development in post-conflict countries. However, international peacebuilding approaches have often prioritised deploying additional peacekeepers over investing in conflict prevention and the contextual analysis needed to understand and address the root causes of violence. As a result, researchers identified the existence of multiple uncoordinated actors engaged in African peacebuilding as a significant challenge.³⁷ Many argue that achieving peacebuilding goals on the continent requires stronger coordination between NGOs, government institutions and international organisations.³⁸ This reflects growing recognition that African peacebuilding consists of multiple levels and actors, layered with spillovers of conflicts across national borders and varying contexts. Efforts must therefore focus on addressing the structural causes of conflict, which are often complex and protracted, and not easily resolved through conventional peacebuilding approaches.³⁹

While APSA was designed to align peacebuilding efforts between the AU and RECs/RMs, implementation has often been undermined by a lack political will or a relative subordination against priority interests of individual states and their leaders. As a result, AU peacebuilding has been limited to ad hoc interventions and partnerships with external

actors. The limited toolbox available to the AU has also led to an overreliance on African-led Peace Support Operations — rather than mediation missions. This has contributed to a growing dependence on force to solve the continent's peace and security challenges.⁴⁰ In some cases, this heavy focus on military-centric approaches or peace enforcement efforts — including counter-insurgency, warfighting, stabilisation, human rights protection, counter-terrorism, state building and regime defence — weaponised the entire process. This dynamic risks incentivising actors to resort to armed responses instead of seeking non-coercive, negotiated solutions.

Traditional approaches for fostering social harmony at the local level and restore relationships towards peaceful societies are critical to long-lasting peace.⁴¹ Yet efforts in this area are often romanticised, marginalised or excluded from formal conflict resolution processes. Their contribution to rebuilding peaceful relationships at the local level remains undervalued. Exacerbating this fragile context is the dominant focus on the state as the central actor. This can reinforce overly linear, causal approaches that fail to account for local complexities or the relational dynamics between individuals within the state, and also non-state actors — leading to long-term consequences that are rarely sufficiently considered. The need to provide rapid response can limit more comprehensive, deliberate peacebuilding processes. It often exacerbates the situation, worsening fragile environments for peace and affecting the chances of peacebuilding success. At the root of these challenges is the failure to address underlying causes — focusing instead on the symptoms. This renders substantial peacebuilding efforts ineffective from the outset. More broadly, peacebuilding has increasingly

been reduced to technical models relying on checklists, templates or becoming overly politicised. At the same time, there is no shared framework to help align competing interests and agendas.⁴² Scholars like Aning (2024) notes that “there is a need for conceptual clarity on the notion of peacebuilding”, adding that such debates “impact on policy processes leading to how securities are constructed and responded to”.⁴³ Recent literature has shifted focus to how knowledge about peacebuilding is generated and how this, in turn, reinforces dominant interpretations of its purpose and practice.⁴⁴ Amid these critiques, adaptive peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected environments has increasingly gained traction.

A framework for responding to peacebuilding challenges in Africa

A growing body of conceptual and empirical work highlights the multi-layered nature of socio-political disorder in conflict-affected settings. These contributions respond to the ongoing question of finding effective frameworks for peacebuilding.⁴⁵ This has given rise to a so-called ‘local turn’⁴⁶ in peacebuilding, alongside the (re)emergence of concepts such as hybridity and adaptiveness within the scholarship.⁴⁷ Hybrid peacebuilding blends formal processes, such as state-led negotiations and international mediation, with traditional and indigenous conflict resolution practices. This approach draws on the strengths of both, providing international legitimacy while respecting and reinforcing local ownership. As a result, there is now a growing global peacebuilding literature that explores the interaction between local and international actors and approaches.⁴⁸ Effective hybrid approaches require credible platforms, institutions and mechanisms to convene local and international stakeholders

around a common framework. To address these shortcomings, regionally adaptive hybridity in peacebuilding must be grounded in systematic analysis and conflict mapping — led collaboratively by both international and local actors.

Other scholars have argued for an adaptive peacebuilding approach that fully involves affected societies and communities in every stage of conflict resolution and peacebuilding interventions. At the same time, prior research has noted that the UN, AU and RECs/RMs have conducted and carried out several activities that can conceptually be viewed as distinctive stabilisation effort(s); designed to stabilise states, environments and regions. These efforts — conceptually distinct from peacebuilding — have led to deployments in Somalia, the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) region, the Sahel, Mozambique and the East African Force to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Despite these interventions, many of the environments in which they operate continue to face serious peacebuilding challenges. These conditions affect stability, risk reversing gains and generate new shocks across Africa's already fragile peace and security landscape. This threatens national, regional and cross-border environments and relative stability.⁴⁹ Additionally, these stabilisation contexts intersect with climate-related challenges and a wider security landscape marked by conflict, political crises, violent extremism, terrorism and disputes over resource control. These compounding threats increase vulnerability and weaken communities' capacity to tackle insecurity.⁵⁰

In response to this complex environment, scholars have advanced adaptive peacebuilding — an approach that recognises the complexity of an evolving environment and the need to include diverse stakeholders. Adaptive

peacebuilding shifts the focus from externally driven solutions to processes that enable self-sustaining peace,⁵¹ emerging organically from within the social systems affected by conflict.⁵² To better understand and respond to these settings, scholars propose the use of complexity theory. This allows peacebuilders to shape a better understanding of inherently complex and non-linear social systems, where different components interact in dynamic, non-linear and asymmetrical ways. These interactions can result in behaviours and effects that cannot be predicted or pre-determined.⁵³

Consequently, adaptive peacebuilding aims to facilitate and stimulate self-organisation by supporting conflict-affected communities to build resilient social institutions capable of withstanding shocks and stressors.⁵⁴ Sustained success depends on broad local representation in decision-making, ensuring that peacebuilding initiatives are people-centred and grounded in the realities of the conflict-affected communities.⁵⁵

This approach is guided by six core principles for navigating complexity in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This analysis adopts De Coning's adaptive peacebuilding approach and integrates it with Tschirgi's regional peacebuilding approach to create a flexible, context-sensitive framework. Finally, it proposes a new framework for peacebuilding responses tailored to today's challenges, particularly those found in stabilisation contexts, based on 13 critical pillars.

The framework encourages entities like the AU and RECs/RMs to work collaboratively on peacebuilding while avoiding a one-size-fits-all model. A core element of this approach is that close attention must be paid to the feedback of a specific initiative — along with its intended

and unintended effects — to assess and select which initiatives can be scaled up and which should be discontinued. Finally, it is crucial that affected communities are afforded the space and the agency to lead their own peacebuilding processes.⁵⁶

Examining continental peacebuilding is an opportunity to apply a specific lens to coordination between actors and institutions. This can contribute to more predictable and strategic partnerships in adaptive peacebuilding, enabling context-specific responses to local and national issues that affect communities. It also underscores the interconnectedness of contemporary peacebuilding issues. The lens is designed to adapt to an evolving environment where institutions like the AU and RECs/RMs often find themselves operating in hyper-local conflict zones, stabilisation contexts or prolonged crises — sometimes in situations where the state itself is the aggressor. In such contexts, peacebuilding efforts are needed to contribute to adaptive efforts that help resolve on-going but persistent crises.

Pillar one: Conflict prevention

Addressing the root causes and drivers of conflict is foundational to all other interventions. Conflict prevention, peace consolidation and sustainable development are intertwined, as reflected in the AU PCRDR policy. Thus, PCRDR serves as a tool to promote dialogue-driven conflict prevention and, ultimately, advance the vision of “An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law”. This pillar calls for action to tackle systemic issues such as governance deficits and resource inequities, while emphasising national and local ownership and addressing the structural causes of conflict.

Key actions include:

- Supporting national entities to develop and implement prevention strategies and mechanisms.
- Promoting effective governance through inclusive, resilient, responsive institutions delivering public goods and services.
- Boosting and sustaining efforts that support good governance and democracy – in line with the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG).
- Advancing the principles and synergy between APSA and the AGA, using the AU Constitutive Act and ACDEG as guiding frameworks.

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The pillar should also work to ensure synergy and complementarity in building responsive institutions and processes. This includes supporting the delivery of free, fair and credible elections; socio-economic reconstruction; climate resilience and development. Other priorities include encouraging national cohesion and regional integration, including infrastructure and institutional mechanisms. Investments are needed in capacity building, research and the development of knowledge products.⁵⁷ Finally, this pillar also entails strengthening the focus on conflict prevention and peacebuilding at the level of the UN Security Council and the AU PSC, as well as aligning UN peacebuilding and prevention activities with continental, regional and national frameworks. The AU-UN partnership should further capitalise on synergies between prevention, peacebuilding and development, particularly through Agenda 2063.

Pillar two: Inclusive democratic transition – effective and inclusive governance, peace dividends

Democratic governance is the linchpin of peace. Its inclusivity helps manage diversity and build legitimacy, while its absence often exacerbates conflicts across the continent. Strengthening governance is essential to (re)establishing the social contract and creating adaptive, context-specific stabilisation strategies to support various forms of transitional governments, systems, mechanisms, and institutions. In this context, the AU's recent launch of the Africa Facility to Support Inclusive Transitions (AFSIT), in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, is a commendable effort to promote inclusive political transitions across the continent. This pillar also entails supporting communities needing humanitarian assistance in all types of environments. To effectively achieve inclusive governance, it is essential to place state-building at the heart

of the peacebuilding strategies — enhancing national ownership and leadership of peacebuilding efforts. Many conflicts in Africa are rooted in from weak state institutions and poor governance structures, which can result in persistent instability and cyclical violence.

Pillar three: Women's multidimensional roles for peacebuilding

Women are transformative agents in peacebuilding. Recognising women's diverse and interconnected roles strengthens the impact of peacebuilding strategies. At the same time, child protection must not be overlooked. The AU has taken significant steps to strengthen this agenda, particularly through the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2020) (UNSCR 1325). Other milestones include the adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (the Maputo Protocol) and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA). The AU has taken additional steps through initiatives such as FemWise and the African Women Leadership Network (AWLN), designed to advance women's inclusion, leadership and influence in decision-making processes. At the global level, the PBC has made commendable strides by adopting a robust gender strategy alongside the establishment of Gender Promotion and Women Mediation Networks. Nonetheless, real progress requires a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach. This means establishing clear mechanisms to champion, monitor and report on the implementation of UNSCR 1325, including through the national and regional plans and/or frameworks and aligning with the AU Continental Results Framework (CRF).

Pillar four: Youth and peacebuilding

Children are among the most vulnerable in conflict settings. Lacking agency and protection, they may be subjected to

recruitment as soldiers, exposed to physical harm, sexual violence, abduction, and denied access to basic rights such as education, healthcare and humanitarian assistance. Peacebuilding initiatives must prioritise child protection, designing tailored strategies that address the specific needs of both boys and girls, and provide pathways for rehabilitation, including access to child-friendly justice, mental health and psychosocial support, and services for survivors of violence. At the same time, youth play a vital role in building peace. UN Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), and 2535 (2020) highlight the critical role of youth in peace and security, alongside the “sustaining peace” resolution 2282 (2016), which provides essential policy frameworks for engaging young women and men in peacebuilding efforts. The PBC’s Strategic Action Plan on Youth and Peacebuilding and its Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Strategy 2024-2026 lay the groundwork for youth inclusion and meaningful participation in peacebuilding activities.

The AU’s Continental Framework on Youth, Peace, and Security 2020-2029, adopted at the PSC’s 933rd meeting, further cements this commitment. It calls for the mainstreaming of youth in all national and regional peace and security policies and programmes. This includes implementing existing national and regional youth roadmaps, and — where none exist — developing them to ensure that commitments made are monitored in a timely and effective way. To fully understand the complex dynamics faced by youth in conflict zones, evidence-based and participatory research is essential. It must explore the lived realities, evolving challenges, and valuable contributions of youth to peacebuilding. By elevating youth voices and recognising their agency, youth can be empowered as pivotal change agents in the pursuit of durable peace.

Pillar five: Transitional justice, transformative mediation, reconciliation, and human rights

For transitional justice efforts to be truly effective, they must align with the provisions articulated in the AU Transitional Justice Policy (AU TJP) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16. Crucially, transitional justice mechanisms should also be tailored to the unique historical, political and social contexts of each country environment. These efforts should also build on and reinforce existing AU, regional and national policies that safeguard economic, social, civil and political rights, as well as the right to development, anchored in the principles of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights.

Pillar six: Building integrated capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and violent extremism

Rising terrorism and violent extremism are not just security threats; they are deeply rooted in unresolved grievances, marginalisation and inter-communal tensions. Regions such as the Sahel, North Africa and the Horn of Africa remain on the frontlines, experiencing escalating violence, the forced displacement of countless civilians and devastating human costs. Addressing this urgent threat requires national governments to take decisive action by developing and implementing comprehensive strategies for preventing and countering violent extremism conducive to terrorism. There is a need to foster collective responsibility and develop joint programmes through enhanced synergies and complementarities in regional approaches, such as efforts in the Lake Chad Basin, Great Lakes region, Manoir River Basin and the Sahel.

Cross-border cooperation is essential, integrating security, justice, development and psychosocial support for communities.

Improved early warning systems and information-sharing mechanisms among national authorities is also vital. These tools enable early response and better tracking of armed groups, terrorist and extremist groups movements. The operationalisation of the PSC Sub-Committee on Counterterrorism is an important step and should be connected to the work of the UN PBC. Moreover, empowering communities and local government structures to engage in violence prevention is vital. Immediate security challenges can be addressed and lasting peace and stability fostered by embedding counter-terrorism within broader capacity-building initiatives. Finally, the UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR) should draw on lessons learned across the continent, particularly where models succeeded in rehabilitating and reintegrating former members of terrorist organisations, while developing and supporting existing judicial capacities at the national and local levels.

Pillar seven: Climate-resilient peace and security

Given Africa's vulnerability to climate change and its implications for peace, the integration of climate considerations into peace and security frameworks is vital for sustainable development and stability. Countries most vulnerable to climate change are often the most fragile and conflict-affected, and their ability to adapt to climate change and its adverse effects — such as extreme weather events, water scarcity, food insecurity and displacement — is hampered by insecurity. Furthermore, climate change compounds existing vulnerabilities, increasing developmental challenges and limiting the capacity to address them through climate adaptation and peacebuilding efforts. It is essential to strengthen efforts by the AU to develop a framework for climate change, peace and security.

The AU and RECs have made environmental sustainability and climate change a key priority through the development of a Common African Position on Climate Change. It focuses on prioritising adaptation; calls for developed countries to reduce emissions; and emphasises enhancing the means of implementation. This includes the scaling up of financial resources, capacity building and transfer of technology to support Africa's needs. Supporting early warning systems; indigenous technologies; climate-resilient infrastructure and establishing climate centres are also highlighted.

These tools enable early response and better tracking of armed groups, terrorist and extremist groups movements

The AU and RECs have made environmental sustainability and climate change a key priority through the development of a Common African Position on Climate Change

Cooperation around climate action can contribute to peacebuilding, and peacebuilding initiatives can strengthen the capacity of communities to adapt to climate change. There is a growing need for the AU, UN and RECs to work together to address the consequences of climate change and establish adaptation and mitigation measures across the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus. This requires policy coherence across programmes and specialised agencies to address not only the immediate consequences of climate change, but also the underlying, context-specific, social, political and economic vulnerabilities.

Pillar eight: Local peacebuilding actors through deeper political consolidation

Local peacebuilding is vital for fostering durable and sustainable peace in post-conflict communities. Its effectiveness stems not merely from addressing sub-national sources of conflict or promoting local leadership through the role of civil society groups and agencies. To truly respond to the needs of a population as they experience and perceive them, it is essential to engage in a meaningful and inclusive process. Only through this comprehensive understanding can bottom-up, locally owned and driven initiatives be cultivated — rather than relying on externally imposed, one-size-fits-all set objectives. There is a clear need to support local actors, strengthen local approaches to governance and empower communities through local peacebuilding efforts and national peace infrastructures — particularly in countries emerging from political or armed conflict.

To truly respond to the needs of a population as they experience and perceive them, it is essential to engage in a meaningful and inclusive process

Pillar nine: Adaptive stabilisation and recovery

Effective stabilisation and recovery initiatives require strategic implementation and alignment with security sector reforms. Over two decades, the AU — working in concert with RECs and RMs — has led and managed activities that can be conceptually understood as distinctive, African-led stabilisation efforts designed to stabilise states, environments, and regions.

These efforts have led to the deployment of the AU peace enforcement operations in Somalia; the AU Regional Stabilisation Strategy for the Lake Chad Basin Region, supported by the Multinational Joint Task Force; the AU mission to The Gambia; the G5 Sahel Force; and the Southern African Development Community missions to Lesotho, Mozambique

and the Democratic Republic of Congo, among others. There is a growing need to more closely examine the connection between disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and peacebuilding — and to better understand how DDR can contribute to conflict prevention and sustainable peace. In this regard, coordination between international and regional bodies working on disarmament and peacebuilding, as there remains a significant gap — one which the PBAR needs to address.

Pillar ten: Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, and security sector reform

DDR and security sector reform (SSR) processes must be nationally owned, with the development of comprehensive national DDR strategies that are both conflict-sensitive and context-specific in their implementation. Accordingly, there is a need to enhance national DDR capacities, as Africa increasingly takes charge of its own peace and security.

The AU has played a key role in supporting states in SSR processes through the AU Policy Framework on SSR. These efforts reflect the AU's central role and commitment to stabilisation, as well as its broader partnership in supporting African states' along the path to peace, stability, and prosperity. Security governance and stabilisation efforts make use of the AU Peace Fund and ensure that stabilisation efforts are integrated within a Peace Continuum — one that is politically grounded, contextually responsive and designed to be graduated and multidimensional in nature.

Pillar eleven: Promoting the peace, security and development nexus

Siloed interventions by different actors have not effectively addressed the root causes of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, particularly

regarding socio-economic development under the AU PCRDR Policy. It is crucial to advance holistic approaches to the peace, security and development (PSD) nexus that align with the peacebuilding and PCRDR policies. This alignment is essential for fostering sustainable peace and development in post-conflict settings. To achieve this, it is important to clarify the PSD nexus and implement it through a coherent understanding of its objectives. Programming must be tailored to meet Africa's unique needs. Local ownership of approaches and flexible funding mechanisms are vital for success — along with private sector investment — to promote collaboration and achieve sustainable, context-sensitive outcomes.

Pillar twelve: Sustained finance for peacebuilding

For conflict-affected countries to build and sustain peace effectively, they require adequate, predictable, and sustained financing. It is also vital for enabling peacebuilding and conflict-prevention activities across Africa. Despite recognition that peacebuilding is a critical investment, funding too often remains short-term, unpredictable and insufficient to address long-term needs. Beyond existing financing mechanisms — such as the Peacebuilding Fund, UN-assessed contribution and the AU Peace Fund — there is a need to explore innovative financing mechanisms. These may include private sector engagement, the use of peace bonds, leveraging income from natural resources, and the allocation of national budgeting resources to peacebuilding.

The AU is strengthening the AU Peace Fund to better support peacebuilding in member states. Technical support in states emerging from conflict is critical to support and complement initiatives such as Agenda 2063 — Africa's development blueprint for inclusive and

sustainable socio-economic development. To maximise the impact of joint activities organised by the AU Commission, its PCRD centre and the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, these efforts must be backed by resources from the UN Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF). There is a need for strategic technical mechanism that empowers collaborative initiatives and ensures that they directly respond to shared AU and UN priorities. Additionally, this pillar calls for enhanced partnership mechanisms between the PBC, international financial institutions (IFIs) and regional financial institutions. It also underscores the importance of reforms in the global financial architecture with reforms in the peacebuilding architecture.

Pillar thirteen: Responding to emerging threats through strengthening coherence

Adapting to emerging threats is crucial to ensure peacebuilding strategies remain relevant and responsive. These include geopolitical shifts; environmental disasters (including climate change); cybersecurity and new technologies such as biotechnology; pandemics; transnational crimes; migrant smuggling and forced displacement. These areas demand proactive prevention, mitigation, and adaptation. Responses should include restoring trust in global institutions, revitalising multilateralism, capacity building, digital learning and targeted financing.

Peacebuilding strategies should be factored into forward-looking approaches. To ensure collective impact, there is a need for greater coherence among the UN, the AU, RECs/RMs, civil society and donors. More targeted engagement with clear outcomes, monitoring mechanisms and mutual accountability can ensure better coordination amongst these actors. Thus, consideration should be given to developing clear frameworks that align,

as appropriate, the efforts of the UN, AU, RECs and donors to reduce fragmentation and enhance impact across peacebuilding interventions. In addition, the development of joint working groups and information-sharing platforms, where they do not already exist, would help to streamline and strengthen peacebuilding initiatives among key actors.

Conclusion

Empowering Africa-led peacebuilding initiatives is crucial for tackling the underlying causes of conflict across the continent. Fostering local solutions and harnessing the resilience of African communities can create a more peaceful and harmonious future — one that offers better pathways for appreciating the networked and intertwined nature of insecurity. The report has argued for a rethink of how we respond to peacebuilding efforts, drawing on an adaptive framework that allows for a context-specific approach to addressing local and national issues that directly affect local communities. It recognises the interconnectedness of peacebuilding challenges across a range of multifaced layers. To this end, the report has presented thirteen pillars of consideration that can complement and harmonise with existing AU and RECs/RMs policies, offering a holistic perspective on how regional organisations can more effectively tackle peacebuilding challenges in Africa.

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About the author

Dr Andrew E. Yaw Tchie is a Senior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), where he manages the NUPI Training for Peace Programme. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of the *African Solutions* Journal. He posts under @DrATchie.

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