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**PEACEBUILDING IN PRACTICE:
THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVE**

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About this journal

The *African Union Journal on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development: Peacebuilding in Practice* is a peer-reviewed publication produced by the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) of the African Union Commission (AUC). Its goal is to promote understanding and discussion on conflict prevention, peacebuilding and recovery efforts throughout Africa. Consistent with the AU's Agenda 2063, the journal provides a platform for policy-oriented research, reflective analysis and practice-based insights, aiming to enhance the design and implementation of peacebuilding and reconstruction initiatives across the continent.

This second edition explores the theme “Peacebuilding in Practice: The Right to Development Imperative”, interrogating how the right to development operates both as a legal and moral obligation (imperative) and as a strategic driving force for sustainable peace and stability in Africa. Building on the peace–security–development nexus within the peace continuum, the edition emphasises people-centred approaches that connect governance, security and development, and examines how continental and global norms on the right to development can be translated into concrete policy and practice.

Articles in this volume analyse how legal and institutional frameworks transform the right to development into tangible actions, analyse the link between normative commitments and actual practice, and investigate how development initiatives can promote social change and inclusive peace. Several articles draw on national and regional experiences to illustrate how development priorities are embedded in peace agreements, national reconstruction plans and governance reforms, and how these choices influence social cohesion, state–society relations, and peace dividends.

Other contributions examine how the right to development is articulated in African peace agreements and legal frameworks, and what this entails for accountability, justiciability and implementation. A dedicated scientometric study maps two and a half decades of research on the right to development and peace in Africa, identifying dominant themes, gaps in African authorship and the marginal treatment of emerging issues such as artificial intelligence and digitalisation. One article foregrounds education as a core expression of the right to development and a foundation for rebuilding communities, while others examine how regional organisations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the AU operationalise pan-African principles of African ownership, solidarity, non-indifference and people-centred development through hybrid mediation, revised post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD) policy frameworks and 50 years of African-led reconstruction practice.

Contributors include scholars, policymakers and practitioners from AU organs and institutions, Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms, the United Nations, think tanks, civil society, academia and the private sector. Together, they offer comparative analysis, case-based lessons and actionable recommendations that bridge the gap between policy and practice.

The African Union Journal on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development: Peacebuilding at Work continues to serve as a knowledge commons for the continent, curating evidence, elevating African perspectives, and informing decision-making for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustainable development.

This edition was produced with the support of the Training for Peace (TfP) programme at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS).

Foreword

By H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye¹

It is with great pleasure that I present the Second Edition of the *African Union Journal on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD): Peacebuilding in Practice*. The AU PCRD Journal is a flagship knowledge initiative of the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) of the African Union Commission. This publication reaffirms the collective commitment of the AU to advancing African-led, African-generated and owned knowledge production, policy innovation and practice in peacebuilding, reconstruction and development.

This edition, themed “Peacebuilding in Practice: The Right to Development Imperative”, is both timely and profound. It invites us to critically examine the right to development not merely as a principle, but as a practical instrument for achieving sustainable peace, stability and resilience. In a continent striving to silence the guns and build lasting peace, the right to development stands as a moral and legal compass that anchors our efforts in human dignity, justice and inclusive growth, as well as sustainable development.

Anchored in the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and guided by the Revised AU Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (2024), this edition reinforces the peace–security–development nexus as the foundation for sustainable recovery and transformation. The contributions herein illuminate the ways in which African countries and institutions translate normative commitments into concrete actions – through peace agreements, national

¹ Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, African Union Commission

reconstruction plans, governance reforms and community-based recovery strategies.

Importantly, this second edition of the PCRD Journal renews the focus to bridge research, policy and practice, serving as an avenue for dialogue among scholars, practitioners, policymakers and youth innovators. It celebrates Africa's growing capacity to define and drive its own peacebuilding agenda, grounded in the principles of African ownership, solidarity and non-indifference.

I highly commend the distinguished authors and contributors, drawn from across Africa and beyond, for their insights and intellectual dedication. Their analyses not only enrich our understanding of the right to development in the peacebuilding context, but also provide actionable pathways for implementation within Member States, AU Organs/institutions and Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms. As we navigate an era marked by complex transitions, tense geopolitical rivalry, evolving impact of new technologies, and threats, it is imperative that we sustain this commitment to evidence-based, inclusive, integrated and people-centred peacebuilding.

The African Union Journal on PCRD stands as a living testament to our conviction that knowledge is both a tool and a catalyst for peace. Let this journal continue to inspire renewed action towards a peaceful, resilient and prosperous Africa, an Africa that truly leaves no one behind.

Ambassador Bankole Adeoye

*Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security
African Union Commission*

Consolidating African Principles in AU Peace Dividends: Fifty Years of African-Led Reconstruction Ideas and Practice, 1975–2025

Amb. Dr Churchill Ewumbue-Monono¹

ABSTRACT

The adoption of the revised African Union (AU) Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy in February 2024 by the 37th AU Assembly of Heads of State was the culmination of 50 years of reflections and practice on an African perspective of peacebuilding in a globalised system. This article describes the dynamics of formulating and implementing a comprehensive PCRD policy in Africa over the past 50 years, first by the Organisation of African Unity (1975–2004) and later by the AU (2004–2006). It highlights the various historical milestones of this process, including policy conceptualisation and development; operationalisation and institutional development; the programmes, activities and initiatives; as well as partnership and popularisation. An understanding of the background, processes and dynamics is necessary for the future implementation of the 2024 revised PCRD policy as a flagship project for the AU's Agenda 2063.

KEYWORDS

Post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD), African Union (AU), peacebuilding, African solutions/African principles, transitional justice and reconciliation

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Development of an African Response to Post-Conflict Reconstruction, 1975–2005

The concept of post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD), which is built on peacebuilding, was defined by Johan Galtung (1976:20) as “a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches and stages needed to transform conflict towards more sustainable, peaceful relations”.

It became official in international circles when the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General and former Egyptian Foreign Minister Boutros Boutros-Ghali published the Agenda for Peace in 1992, followed by the Agenda for Development (UN 1994) and the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Report on Human Security (1994).

Although the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) had also espoused this concept in 1975 when Galtung coined it, it took some 30 years for the PCRD to be encapsulated in the AU Peace and Security Architecture with the adoption of the policy paper in 2006, which was revised in 2024. According to the revised PCRD policy, peacebuilding is a comprehensive set of measures that seek to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflicts through assessing and addressing the needs of countries and regions affected by conflicts, violence and instability, including the needs of affected populations.² This definition is the outcome of 50 years of experiences and lessons learnt within the OAU (1974–2004) and the AU (2004–2024) in their policy responses to post-conflict societies on the continent.

Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Response in the OAU, 1975–2005

The first wave of reflections for an African-grown PCRD policy can be traced to the OAU Inter-African Convention and the OAU African Technical Cooperation Programme adopted by the Kampala Summit of 28 July to 1 August 1975, which provided for “the deployment of African experts in key areas of need for post-conflict countries”³.

These 1970s and 1980s “post-conflict countries” were the newly independent African states. They were ravaged by the liberation wars, with high numbers of

2 Revised African Union Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development Policy Paper. 2024. Communique of 1198th meeting of the PSC, 31 Jan. 2024.

3 OAU Resolutions CM/67(XXIV) on the OAU Technical Cooperation Programme; CM/Res.408(XXIV) of February 1975 on the attachment of the Bureau of Technical Cooperation to the Office of the Administrative Secretary-General of the OAU; CM/Res. 409(XXIV) on Inter-African Convention Establishing an African Technical Cooperation Programme; CM/Res. 412(XXIV) on the establishment of an OAU Technical Cooperation Fund; CM/Res. 413(XXIV) and CM/Res. 479(XXVII) of July 1976.

refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who needed reintegration, rehabilitation, recovery and development. These programmes, through Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), were managed by the OAU Coordinating Committee on African Refugees (CCAR) and the Bureau for the Placement and Education of African Refugees (BPEAR).

When Mozambique, Cape Verde, Comoros, and São Tomé and Príncipe were admitted into the OAU in July 1975, the organisation provided a framework of technical assistance, which included setting up a Special Assistance Fund for the four newly independent states that had emerged from armed conflicts. It also provided financing through voluntary contributions from OAU member states, non-African governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as from various institutions and initiatives under the umbrellas of Arab Funds for Cooperation and Development and the Friends of Africa.⁴ The clamour for an appropriate mechanism to address funding for these post-conflict societies and other emergencies led to the establishment of the OAU Guarantee and Solidarity Fund.⁵

A major influence on PCRDR in Africa during this period was Egypt's Foreign Minister Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who viewed it as a tool to address the escalating refugee crises stemming from armed conflicts. Addressing the post-conflict rehabilitation of refugees and returnees was one of his objectives during his campaigns for election as the Director-General of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for which he was endorsed by the OAU in March 1985.⁶

The second wave of reflections on an African PCRDR policy under the OAU was instituted under the frame of sustainable peace and development within the Conference of the African Ministers of Environment. During its meeting of December 1988 in Cairo, it recommended an OAU Programme of Action for Technical Cooperation among African Countries to promote environmentally sound sustainable peace and development, and to address post-conflict reconstruction.⁷

The third wave of reflections on the PCRDR was within the context of managing and resolving conflicts in Africa, which led to the 1993 OAU Cairo Declaration creating the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution of conflicts on the continent. The crises in the Great Lakes, notably in Burundi and Rwanda, presented Africa's first major humanitarian challenges, which called for regional and continental African responses to PCRDR.

4 OAU Resolutions CM/Res.419(XXIV) of July 1975 and CM/Res.420 of July 1975.

5 OAU Resolution CM/Res.717(XXXIII) of July 1979 in Monrovia, Liberia.

6 OAU Resolution CM/Res.965(XLI) of February–March 1985.

7 OAU Resolution 1232(L) of July 1989.

For instance, the July 1993 Protocol of Agreement between the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the Government of Rwanda on the Repatriation and Resettlement of Refugees created a Secretariat of State for Rehabilitation and Social Integration as well as a National Refugee Commission with local committees to design and implement PCRD activities.⁸ Africa's effort to provide a continental response to PCRD was also expressed during the Bujumbura Conference in February 1995, which focused on assistance to refugees in the Great Lakes Region. The OAU/International Peace Academy (IPA) seminar in Addis Ababa of May 1993 had a session on national reconciliation and reconstruction, which concluded:

[the] time is now ripe to pay greater attention to activities relating to post-conflict period, in particular with regard to re-integration, reconciliation, rehabilitation and constitution-making.

g. Reconciliation must occur on many levels: national, sub-national, and local levels and normally involves many social groups, including ex-combatants, refugees, IDPs as well as *home-stayees*.⁹

The PCRD was highlighted in May 1994 during another OAU/IPA meeting and in the November 1995 OAU Framework Document to strengthen the conflict management division, which envisaged a post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction, resettlement and development programme, anchored on two components: a Relief and Rehabilitation Programme and a Reconstruction, Resettlement and Development Programme (Tschirigi 2004).

The fourth wave of reflections on the PCRD involved the integration of African traditional principles and institutions of conflict management in post-conflict societies, focusing on confessions, reconciliation, restoration and healing. It was anchored in the "African solutions to African problems" maxim of the 1990s, which referred to the integration of African values, principles and approaches to the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts on the continent, as opposed to external solutions, even if they were Africa-led. Examples of such African solutions to sustainable peace and reconciliation in African post-conflict societies include the Gacaca and Abunzi systems in Rwanda; the Court of the Sheikhs and the Isi in Oromo and Afar regions of Ethiopia; the Ekika in Buganda; and the Judiyya in Darfur, Sudan.

8 See the Protocol to the Arusha Agreement between the RPF and the Government of Rwanda on the Repatriation of Refugees and the Resettlement of Displaced Persons signed in Arusha on 9 June 1993; the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Treaty on Burundi, 28 August 2000.

9 OAU/IPA Consultation, "The OAU and Conflict Management in Africa": Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations, Addis Ababa, 19–21 May 1993.

In November 1999, the OAU organised an All Africa Conference on African Principles of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation in Addis Ababa. It highlighted a number of traditional and indigenous African mechanisms in conflict resolution and reconciliation in post-conflict societies, notably in Rwanda and Somalia. In addition, national commissions were introduced in the 1980s and 1990s to implement transitional, restorative and transformative justice in the post-conflict societies of Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. However, as Biswaro (2025: 132) remarked,

In every post-conflict society, a plethora of interlocking variables (i.e. the context in which the transition is to be attempted, the intensity of the post-conflict, the depth of the individual and the societal trauma) determine the path that should be followed in order for reconciliation both as a goal and as a process to flourish.

AU Policy Response to Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development, 2004–2024

Under the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), PCRDR was given greater attention in Article 6 of the PSC Protocol, which empowered the Council to “undertake peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, humanitarian action and disaster assistance”. Moreover, Article 13(3)(c) and (f) empowered the African Standby Force with the functions of “peacebuilding, post-conflict disarmament and demobilization and humanitarian assistance”. Article 14(1) directed the PSC to assist in the reconstruction of the rule of law as well as the establishment and development of democratic institutions.

During a brainstorming retreat in Cape Town in May 2004, the Addis Ababa-based African Ambassadors reconceptualised the PCRDR by recommending that:

- (a) post-conflict reconstruction should include the notion of nation-building, and should focus on how better to engage the parties or combatants so as to build trust among the parties and create the space for building the necessary institutions and infrastructure for nation-building;
- (b) consideration should be given to the humanitarian aspect of post-conflict reconstruction, particularly the needs of refugees, displaced persons and returnees; and

(c) the role of the African Union in post conflict reconstruction should be clearly defined and enhanced.¹⁰

The Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy of 28 February 2004 stipulates in paragraph 22:

In the area of post-conflict peace-building, the Peace and Security Council shall work towards the consolidation of peace agreements that have been negotiated; the establishment of conditions for political, social and economic reconstruction of the society and government institutions; the implementation of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes, including those relating to child soldiers; the settlement and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons; and the provision of assistance to vulnerable persons including children, the elderly, women, and other traumatised groups in the society.¹¹

In November 2004, the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) organised an international conference in Addis Ababa on African Conflicts, Management, Resolution, Post-Conflict Recovery and Development. The issues were further highlighted in the AU–UNDP Steering Committee project on conflict management in Africa of 8 September 2005 as well as during the International Conference for Peace with Development in Africa organised by the AU Commission and UPEACE on 12–14 June 2006 (Seyoum 2006).

The AU PCRDR framework was developed at the seventh Ordinary Session of the Executive Council in Sirte, Libya, in July 2005. The PSC has also been at the forefront of the AU's PCRDR policy and the Council has been addressing it in the context of country and regional conflict situations. It dedicated its first consideration on the issue during its 39th Session of 30 September 2005 on Sudan.¹²

The AU PCRDR policy framework was endorsed by the Executive Council at its ninth Ordinary Session in Banjul, The Gambia (June–July 2006), through Executive Council Decision EX.CL/Dec.302(IX). This followed the 2005 Sirte mandate requesting the AU Commission to elaborate the framework.

10 Report of the Third Brainstorming Retreat of African Ambassadors in Addis Ababa on the Peace and Security Agenda, 1–4 May 2004, para. 16 (iv–vi).

11 <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/declaration-cadsp-en.pdf>

12 EX.CL/Dec.302(IX).

The framework aims to enhance the timeliness, effectiveness and coordination of activities in post-conflict countries, providing a comprehensive guide for consolidating peace, preventing relapse into conflict, and laying the foundations for social justice and sustainable peace.¹³ It is grounded in five key principles: African leadership; national and local ownership; inclusiveness; equity and non-discrimination; and capacity-building for sustainability.

The policy is structured around six indicative pillars: security; political governance and transition; socio-economic reconstruction and development; human rights, justice and reconciliation; women and gender; and humanitarian assistance. Child protection is addressed within the humanitarian assistance pillar and the human rights, justice and reconciliation pillar, rather than as a stand-alone pillar.

The PCRDR is also embedded in a number of AU peace and security instruments and declarations:

- The Tripoli Declaration and Plan of Action of 31 August 2009 on the Elimination of Conflicts in Africa and the Promotion of Sustainable Peace. African leaders committed “to push forward the agenda of conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction”, and determined to “show required solidarity with African countries emerging from conflicts and to assist them in consolidating their hard-won peace and avoiding relapse into violence.”¹⁴
- The Cairo Call for Peace following the High-Level Retreat on Peace, Security and Stability. Paragraph 8 stressed “the importance of comprehensive post-conflict reconstruction and development programmes in countries emerging from conflicts building on relevant AU, UN and other institution’s instruments and policies and strengthening them where required.”¹⁵
- The Malabo Declaration on the tenth anniversary of the PSC of 25 June 2014. Paragraph 3 acknowledged:

Regular engagements between the PSC and other AU Organs, particularly with regard to conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction and development on our continent is of uttermost importance.¹⁶

13 Executive Council Decision EX.CL/Dec.302(X) of 2006.

14 PSC/AHG/2 (CCLI). The Progress Report of the 2009 Tripoli Declaration that was submitted to the 29th PSC meeting of 30 November 2010 at the level of Heads of State endorsed the role of PCRDR in para. 11.

15 Cairo Call for Peace: High-Level Retreat on Peace, Security and Stability in Africa, 26–28 August 2010, p. 2.

16 See also the Cairo Roadmap on Enhancing Peacekeeping Operations from Mandate to Exit and the Malabo Declaration of 25 May 2022, which strengthened the humanitarian–PCRDR nexus.

This was reiterated in the Dar es Salaam Declaration of 25 May 2024 marking the 20th anniversary of the PSC. Paragraph 14 called for:

Stronger and more sustained support to countries emerging from conflict with regard to reconciliation and post-conflict stabilization, reconstruction and development to prevent relapses into conflict, including the full operationalization of the Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) Centre.

Revitalisation and Reconceptualisation of the AU PCRD, 2011–2024

In January 2011, the government of Egypt tried to redynamise the AU PCRD policy framework by proposing the adoption of Decision 351(XVI) on the need to create a PCRD centre, which was reiterated in Decision 408(XVIII). In June 2011, a two-day technical meeting on the PCRD was organised in Addis Ababa to review the modalities of application of the policy framework. It brought together the relevant departments of the AU Commission, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other partners such as the European Union (EU), UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Department for International Development (DfID) and experts from concerned governments.

The next years were marked by the launching of the African Solidarity Initiative (ASI) in 2012, the “Silencing of the Guns” in 2013, the commemoration of the tenth anniversary in 2014 and the tenth anniversary workshop in 2016, which took stock of the achievements and the shortcomings with recommendations.

In August 2019, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi was appointed the AU Champion of the PCRD and given a mandate for the “Revival and Activation of the AU Policy for the PCRD” in accordance with Assembly Decision 729(XXX11) of February 2020. This put Egypt in the driver’s seat of the PCRD policy development in Africa. In 2019, Egypt launched the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace as a flagship policy development platform. Since then, the Forum has taken place five times (in 2019, 2021, 2023, 2024 and 2025).

Apart from the Common African Position to the 2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture endorsed by the PSC on 22 September 2020, that year also saw the 958th meeting on 23 October 2020, which focused on a review of PCRD through its centre, the reactivation of the PCRD subcommittee, and the biannual PSC briefing on the PCRD. The Commission also completed

the AU Security Sector Reforms Strategy for 2021–2023, with a focus on PCRD activities such as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR).¹⁷

During the 14th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly in Johannesburg on 6 December 2020, the prime minister of Lesotho, as chairperson of the PSC, Dr Moeketsi Majoro, recommended that the AU should:

Mainstream peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction and development activities in all efforts aimed at achieving peace and security in Africa, while underscoring the importance of the national ownership of those activities, while also expediting the operationalisation of the AU PCRD Centre in Cairo, Egypt and capacitating it with the necessary resources.¹⁸

Moreover, in November 2021, the AU Commission organised a High-Level Seminar on PCRD on the implementation of the six pillars of its 2006 policy paper, to coincide with its 15th anniversary. It brought together the experiences of over 50 participants, including AU Special Representatives and Permanent Representatives of the Chairperson of the Commission (SRCCs) as well as specialised institutions such as the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), African Development Bank (ADB) and African Governance Architecture-African Peace and Security Architecture (AGA-APSA).

This was followed by the PSC 1047th meeting of 12 November 2021 under Egypt's presidency. It called upon the AU Commission to "review and update the AU Policy Framework for PCRD to enhance a comprehensive response for better coordination and complementarity with regional and international efforts in building and sustaining peace". This call to review the policy framework was reiterated by Assembly Decision 815(XXXV) of February 2022.

Consequently, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) appointed ten experts and a rapporteur in March 2022. In a workshop in Accra on 9–14 September 2022, they added two new pillars to the existing PCRD policy: youth and climate change. Egypt was hosting the C027 in Sharm El-Sheik in November 2022 to launch the Climate Responses for Sustaining Peace (CRSP).

17 See PSC communique: 1047th (12 Nov. 2021) called for updating the 2006 policy; Assembly Decision 815 (Feb. 2022) reiterated review; Accra experts meeting (Sept. 2022); Cairo meeting (May–June 2023); PSC validation 1188th (Nov. 2023) and 1198th (31 Jan. 2024); Assembly adoption Feb. 2024.

18 Statement by H.E Hon. Dr Moeketsi Majoro Ex/Assembly/AU/3(XIV), p. 6.

A second meeting of government experts took place in Cairo on 30 May–1 June 2023. This was followed by the Dar es Salaam workshop of August 2023 to ensure the integration of the gender component. This paved the way for validation by the PSC during its 1188th meeting of November 2023 and the 1198th meeting of 31 January 2024, before its eventual adoption by the 37th AU Assembly in February 2024.

Between 18 and 24 November 2024, the AU Commission organised a High-Level Meeting in Kinshasa on the Implementation of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) Programmes for the Consolidation of Peace, Security and Socio-Economic Activities: Challenges and Way Forward. The seminar, which was part of the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the PSC and the PCRD week, was adopted by the 1245th PSC meeting.¹⁹

Operationalisation and Institutional Development of PCRD

Institutional Development

The first attempt at institutional development for the AU PCRD was given by the government of Egypt, which proposed the adoption of Decision 351(XVI) in January 2011 on the need to create a PCRD centre and Decision 408(XVIII) of January 2012.

Institutional development of the AU PCRD was reinforced with the creation of an Inter-Departmental Task Force within the AU Commission. It was inaugurated on 16 May 2016 as a platform to coordinate and facilitate the formulation and implementation of a comprehensive AU PCRD policy. The Task Force, which included representatives of RECs, undertook an assessment mission to the Central African Republic (CAR) in August 2016.

Institutional development during this period was also marked by the reactivation of ASI in accordance with Decision 408(XVIII). Moreover, the operationalisation of the PCRD centre as a toolkit of APSA was pursued through Assembly Decision 710(XXXI) of July 2018, in which Egypt agreed to host the centre. A host agreement was signed in December 2019. Institutional development continued with Assembly Decision 756 of February 2020 and was consecrated in the PSC Communique 1037 of October 2021.

Consequently, in December 2021, the AU PCRD centre was launched as a “hub of operational excellence on peacebuilding efforts on the continent”, which

¹⁹ <https://amaniafrica-et.org/high-level-session-on-implementation-of-ddr-and-pcrd-programmes-for-consolidation-of-peace-security-and-socio-economic-activities-challenges-and-way-forward/?utm>

took effect in December 2021 in Cairo.²⁰ Moreover, within the AU Commission, a PCRD team was instituted under a seconded senior advisor on PCRD, assisted by two political officers. The Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (CPAPS) also proposed a Working Group of Experts on the PCRD that would serve as a new coordination mechanism of the Commission's Inter-Departmental Task Force.

The period was also marked by the reactivation of the PCRD Subcommittee through PSC Communiqués 985 (October 2020), 1017 (August 2021), 1122 (November 2022) and 1222 (2022), in conformity with Article 7(g) and (8) of the PSC Protocol. On 24 October 2024, the Council met at the level of experts to advance the reactivation under Egypt's chairship.

Review of the 2006 AU PCRD Policy Framework

As part of its policy development, the AU has also been involved in reviewing its 2006 policy framework to adapt to new continental and global challenges. Most of this review by the PSC has focused on lessons learnt during consideration of over 15 post-conflict situations in countries under transition on the continent.²¹

Policy review has been an integral part of the PCRD. A month after its adoption, a number of scholars, practitioners and observers met in Accra in August 2006 for a Lessons Learnt and Review Conference on Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in seven African countries: Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Sudan (Knight 2008). A review of these PCRD activities was also pursued by the PSC in its various meetings such as the 138th meeting of 28 June 2008 on the post-conflict situations in Burundi, CAR, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC and South Sudan.²²

The call for a review of the 2006 AU PCRD policy framework was reaffirmed by Assembly Decision 815(XXXV), adopted at the 35th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly in February 2022. This decision underscored the need to update the policy in light of emerging peacebuilding challenges, lessons learned, and the evolving African governance and security landscape.

20 Report on the State of Peace and Security in Africa by the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, H.E. Amb. Bankole Adeoye, 6 February 2022.

21 The 138th session and HOSG (2008) on conflicts and post-conflict situations in Africa; the 226th session of 8 July 2010 on the review of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (UNPBC) in New York on the status of implementation of the AU PCRD; the 230th session of 27–31 May 2010 on the Multidisciplinary Mission to Burundi and the DRC to assess the PCRD requirements; the 525th session (2015) on Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation in Post-Conflict Societies in Africa; and the meeting of 23 October 2020.

22 Report of the Commission on Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations in Africa. PSC/HSG/Comm(CXXXVII) of 28 June 2008. The author chaired the PSC 1017th meeting of 5 August.

In July 2022, the AU Commissioner for PAPS appointed a Technical Working Group of ten African experts with clearly defined Terms of Reference to support the revision process. The experts held their inaugural meeting and technical workshop in Accra, Ghana, from 9–14 September 2022. They reviewed the structure, principles and implementation gaps of the 2006 policy and proposed a new set of indicative pillars aligned with contemporary peacebuilding frameworks.

The need to formalise this revision was subsequently reinforced by PSC Communique 1122, adopted at its 1122nd meeting on 28 November 2022. It endorsed the establishment of the Working Group on PCRDR and directed the AU Commission to integrate the proposed new pillars and thematic areas into the revised policy framework.

A second meeting of government experts on the review of the PCRDR policy framework was convened by the AU Commission in Addis Ababa from 30 May to 1 June 2023, to review and validate the outcomes of the Accra technical consultations. The draft revised framework then benefited from further inputs and policy guidance during the fourth Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development, held in Cairo, Egypt, on 2–3 July 2024. Participants emphasised coherence with the AU's 2024–2033 Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063 and the operationalisation of the African Peace Fund.

Policy review of the PCRDR is also an opportunity to integrate African principles in the global peacebuilding architecture. For example, a High-Level Dialogue on Cultivating Consensus Towards a Common African Position on the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review took place on 21 November 2024, as well as a Roundtable Discussion on the Operationalisation of the Women and Gender Pillar on the AU PCRDR policy.

PCRDR Programmes, Activities and Initiatives

Between 2006 and 2011, the AU deployed PCRDR Multidisciplinary Assessment Missions (MAM) to countries emerging from conflicts, including CAR (April 2006), DRC and Burundi (January–February 2010), Sudan (March–April 2011) and Cote d'Ivoire (November 2011). These missions made detailed recommendations on how best the AU and its member states could assist the concerned countries in post-conflict reconstruction.²³

The AU has also organised African Solidarity Conferences (ASC) to advocate for assistance from partners for Sierra Leone in 2007, and for Liberia in 2009 and 2011.

²³ Report of the Commission on the Establishment of an African Union Centre for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development. 20th Executive Council, EX.CL/711(XX) 23–27 January 2012, p. 2.

The PSC has dedicated many meetings to post-conflict reconstruction activities, such as the 60th meeting on Liberia; the 93rd (2007) on CAR; the 230th (2010) on DRC and Burundi; the 248th (2010) on Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Niger; the 470th (2014) on Burundi, CAR and Guinea Bissau; and the 818th on the PCRDR efforts in the Sahel region.²⁴

The PSC also used a number of toolkits in its assessment of the activities of the PCRDR, such as the MAM and Need Assessment Missions (NAMS) to Burundi and the DRC in February 2010.²⁵ The AU organised ASCs, and deployed the AU Ministerial Committee on the PCRDR to Sudan in October 2010. Additionally, it organised a Lessons Learnt Workshop on Liberia's Governance, Economic and Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in August 2010.

There were other PCRDR toolkits such as the QIPs, inspired by the OAU, and Peace Strengthening Projects (PSPs), based on locally identified needs and priorities, in addition to receiving support through the ASI. Others included plans such as the Somalia Transition Plan (STP) launched in 2022, the Regional Security and Stabilisation Strategy (RSSS) in the Lake Chad Basin and, more recently, the UNDP's African Facility to Support Inclusive Transitions (AFSIT).

At the 19th Ordinary Session of the policy organs of the AU in July 2012, ASI was launched through Assembly Decision 425(XIX) as an AU-led process for mobilising support from within the continent for countries emerging from conflict. It was welcomed by the 352nd PSC meeting of 16 January 2013 on PCRDR, during which the Council stressed the importance of promoting champions on the continent with the necessary capacity to take initiatives towards the implementation of PCRDR programmes.²⁶

The following year, the PSC adopted the Malabo Declaration of 25 June 2014 on the tenth anniversary of the Council. The PSC called for stronger and more sustained support to countries emerging from conflict with regard to reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction and development. It also stressed the importance of consolidating the peace and security gains on the continent in the post-conflict phase to prevent relapses into conflict.

24 The year 2020 was a turning point on PCRDR as the PSC embarked on country-specific issues in its meetings, such as the 913th on Sudan, 945th on South Sudan, 949th on Somalia, and 954th and 966th on Mali.

25 PSC 230th meeting of 27 May 2010 on Report of the AU Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation Mission on the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Needs in Burundi and DR Congo.

26 AU Press Release: Africa Helping Africa. Declaration on the Launch of the African Solidarity Initiative (ASI) for the Mobilisation of Support for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development in Africa. 14 July 2012, para. iv.

One of the cornerstones of the AU's PCRD policy is its focus on transitional justice and reconciliation, which can be traced to its 525th meeting of July 2015, which agreed to include "peace, reconciliation and justice in post-conflict societies in Africa" as a regular item on the PSC's annual programme of activities.²⁷ Since 2015, the PSC has dedicated six sessions to transitional justice, peace and reconciliation.²⁸

In February 2019, the AU Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) was adopted. Transitional justice is defined as

various (formal and traditional or non-formal) policy measures and institutional mechanisms that societies, through an inclusive consultative process, adopt in order to overcome past violations, divisions and inequalities and to create conditions for both security and democratic and socio-economic transformation.²⁹

The PSC also stepped up its policy on reconciliation as a component of the PCRD during its 899th meeting of 5 December 2019 under Angola, when it agreed to dedicate a session to lessons learnt on national reconciliation, peace restoration and nation cohesion building in Africa. In February 2022, the AU Assembly adopted Decision 501(XXII) declaring 2014–2024 as the Madiba Nelson Mandela Decade of Reconciliation in Africa. Moreover, in its 17th Extraordinary Session in Malabo of May 2022, the Assembly designated President Joao Manuel Lourenco as the AU Champion on national reconciliation in Africa, while 31 January was declared Africa Day of Peace and Reconciliation.

The AU's humanitarian principles guiding its PCRD activities and programmes have also been integrated in its humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDPN), Humanitarian and Natural Disaster Support (HANDS) policy, Humanitarian Policy Framework (2016) and the Common African Position on Humanitarian Effectiveness in Africa (2016).

The AU has undertaken a number of humanitarian actions under its PCRD programmes, covering post-emergency activities, voluntary repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction. For instance, the Malabo AU

27 See also the PSC 1017th (2021) meeting on AU support to member states on political transition and post-conflict situations under Cameroon; the 1047th meeting under Egypt; and the 1102rd meeting of 22 August 2022 on lessons learnt on the implication of AU Transitional Justice Policy: Impact on National Resilience and Democratisation.

28 These include the 383rd ministerial meeting in Algiers on the conduct of national reconciliation processes in Africa; the 525th session of July 2015, which made peace, reconciliation and justice a standing item in the Council's programme; and the 672rd session of March 2016.

29 The AUTJP also ensures accountability, reconciliation, community participation, victim-centredness, and restitution through both formal and informal structures and restorative and retributive processes. Tribunals, truth and reconciliation commissions, peace commissions, reparations and memorialisation are examples of transitional justice processes.

Extraordinary Humanitarian Summit and Pledging Conference on 27 May 2022 and its ten-year Implementation Plan call for the integration of PCRDR activities to integrate humanitarian actions into peace and security processes to ensure that food security, pandemics, climate change and natural disasters are addressed.

Finally, the implementation of DDR programmes is also a key PCRDR activity and there is abundant experience from countries such as Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, South Sudan, CAR and Mozambique. In November 2024, the AU Commission organised a High-Level Seminar in Kinshasa, which called on countries of the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin Commission, such as Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon, to apply for DDR programmes.

The OAU PCRDR and Global Governance, 1974–2004

AU Cooperation with UN, EU and Other Strategic Partners

The integration of African principles on peacebuilding into global governance can be attributed to the Egyptian scholar-diplomat and former Foreign Minister, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who, as UN Secretary-General, introduced post-conflict peacebuilding in December 1992 as the last pillar of his Agenda for Peace.

He defined peacebuilding as measures taken “not only to consolidate peace after war, but also to prevent renewed violence in countries that had recently experienced conflict”. It therefore involved any “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict” (Saul 2014: 3). Global peacebuilding was embedded in the concept of conflict transformation:

a process by which conflicts are transformed into peaceful outcomes, which differs from conflict resolution and management approaches as it recognises that contemporary conflicts cannot be resolved simply through the reframing of positions and identification of win-win positions, but...by addressing the root causes to eliminate the drivers of “structural violence” because a seemingly resolved conflict may resurface long afterwards because the underlying conflict remains. (Miall 2004: 3, in Ferim 2017)

Global peacebuilding has three main phases: initial response, transformation and fostering sustainability. It is built around four pillars: security, justice and reconciliation, social and economic well-being, and governance and participation (Tschirigi 2004). Knight (2008: 26) outlines the following activities as comprising the global peacebuilding rolled out by Boutros-Ghali in his supplement to the Agenda for Peace:

Disarming warring factions, restoring law and order, decommissioning and destroying weapons, repatriating refugees, reintegrating internally displaced persons into their communities, providing advisory and training support for security personnel, improving police and judicial systems, monitoring elections, demining and other forms of demilitarisation, providing technical assistance to fledgling states coming out of conflict, advancing efforts to protect human rights, reforming and strengthening institutions of governance, promoting formal and informal participation in the political process, and facilitating social and economic development.

Under Boutros-Ghahi's leadership, the Agenda for Peace was reinforced by other UN policy papers: Agenda for Development (1994), UNDP Report on Human Development (1994), the supplement to Agenda for Peace (1995), Inventory of Post-Conflict Peace-Building Activities (1996) and Agenda for Democracy (1996).

Kofi Annan, the second African UN Secretary-General, continued the global policy development through the 2000 Brahimi Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations; the 2003 Review of Technical Cooperation in the United Nations; the 2004 More Secure World and the 2005 In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All.³⁰ These blueprint papers recommended new peacebuilding toolkits and strategies such as the QIPs, a fund for DDR programmes and security sector reforms (SSR), the integration of Rule of Law teams in peace support operations, the creation of peacebuilding units, and regularised funding for the Electoral Affairs Division.³¹

They also gave a doctrinal shift in the concept through the "responsibility to protect," which legitimised the right to humanitarian intervention. The global architecture was endowed with an international peacebuilding institutional mechanism on 20 December 2005 with the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (UNPBC), through UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/1645, and UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/180, charged with coordinating peacebuilding activities within the UN system.

Policy consultations between the PSC and UNPBC started the Council's 114th meeting of 10 March 2008 with a briefing on the activities of the UNPBC by Carolyn McAskie, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding.³² The African perspectives on peacebuilding were, however, first sounded on 19 June 2008 by H.E. Joachim Chissano, the Chairperson of the African Forum of Heads

30 https://www.un.org/en/ga/62/plenary/peacebuilding_commission/bkg.shtml?utm

31 Ibid.

32 Press Statement PSC/PR/BR(CXIV) of 10 March 2008.

of State and Government and AU Special Envoy on the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), when he briefed the Organisational Committee on Peacebuilding Towards the Construction of Capable States in Africa.³³

This was followed by a briefing on 17 April 2008 to the PBC by the PSC chairperson, Sahle-Work Zewde.³⁴ The PSC was further briefed during its 208th meeting of 9 November 2009 on ways to improve cooperation with the UNPBC and, thereafter, decided to meet regularly on peacebuilding and PCRCD in Africa. This was followed on 19 April 2010, during the 226th meeting of the PSC, with a briefing by the facilitators of the review of the UNPBC.³⁵ There were other engagements in October 2009, July 2010, November 2014, October 2016, November 2019, 13 November 2023 and 14 October 2024.

The first consultative meeting between the PSC and the UNPBC was held on 8 July 2010 in New York, with exchange of views on peacebuilding processes in Burundi, CAR, Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone, leading to a Joint Chair's Summary of the Discussions. During the meeting of 18 October 2016, the two organs agreed to cooperate in five main areas, including "joint visits to conflict and post-conflict areas in Africa and PSC-UNPBC interactive sessions with countries in transition". The chairperson of the UNPBC further briefed the PSC during its 470th meeting of 26 November 2014 on peacebuilding activities in CAR, Burundi and Guinea Bissau.

To enhance Africa's contribution towards the global review of the UN peacebuilding system, the PSC dedicated a session in September 2020 to an African Common Position on the 2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture: Towards an Enhanced Global Peacebuilding System. This was followed by its 958th meeting of 23 October 2020, which also discussed its annual consultative meeting with the UNPBC.

Cooperation on the PCRCD with the UN and its institutions was reinforced during this period, especially with the Egyptian and Brazilian chairships of the UNPBC. Moreover, Egypt and Cote d'Ivoire co-chaired the Group of Friends on Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration at the UN. In August 2021, the UNDP presented AFSIT during Cameroon's chairship, which was inaugurated in Nairobi in July 2023.

Other international partners involved in the promotion of global peacebuilding in post-conflict societies in Africa between 1992 and 2004 include the World Bank and the EU. In 1997, for instance, the World Bank published its Framework for

33 UN Secretary General Noon briefing 20 June 2008.

34 UN Document A/63/92S/2008/417 of 24 June 2008.

35 Press Statement PSC/PR/Comm(CCXXIV) of 19 April 2010.

World Bank Involvement in Post-Conflict Reconstruction, which focused on the development aspects of peacebuilding.³⁶ The World Bank further developed the Multi-Country Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme (MDRP)³⁷ during the fourth regional consultations of UN agencies Working Groups in Africa held in Addis Ababa in October 2002, when it was recommended that a “post-conflict and humanitarian response cluster”, which was endorsed by the UN General Assembly Resolution A/57/7 of November 2002 that gave NEPAD the role of an implementing agency on PCRD projects in Africa in addition to the UN’s Trust Fund to finance post-conflict reconstruction activities.³⁸

The EU has also developed a security strategy for post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa. The main between the OAU and the AU is that while the former emphasised on African solutions to African problems, the AU espoused “African-led” solutions based on who implements, rather than who formulates and designs the solutions. Other EU initiatives include the launching of the African Development Bank’s Fragile State Facility (FSF) in 2007, with a budget of US\$600 million to provide reconstruction funds to beneficiary countries, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC, CAR, Burundi, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea Bissau and South Sudan.

Although partnership on PCRD was marred by Covid-19, peacebuilding featured prominently during the eighth ministerial session of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in November 2021 in Dakar; the AU–EU Summit in February 2022 in Brussels; and the eighth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) Summit in August 2022. On 25 October 2023, the AU and EU launched the Initiative for Transitional Justice in Africa (ITJA), aimed at enhancing cooperation with countries under transition.

Popularisation and Field Missions, 2004–2024

The successful implementation of the AU PCRD principles lies in its understanding and popularisation. In this connection, the AU launched a PCRD Awareness and African Solidarity Programme, which materialised with the inaugural PCRD Awareness Week on 7–13 November 2021, under the theme Greater Awareness, Stronger Peacebuilding. This was followed by the second Awareness Week from 21–28 November 2022 under the theme Towards Repositioning Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development in Africa. The third Awareness Week took place from 22–30 November 2023 under the theme Fostering Africa’s Future Through Sustained Peacebuilding.

36 <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/175771468198561613/pdf/multi-page.pdf>

37 <https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/481721468149096857/the-multi-country-demobilization-and-reintegration-program-final-report-overview-of-program-achievements>

38 Final Review and Appraisal of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s and support for the New Partnership for Africa’s Development. A/57/468/Add.1 of 20 November 2002.

Field missions also help to create a better understanding and popularise the AU PCRDR principles. In 2022, for instance, the AU's Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security organised Multilateral Field Assessment Missions to CAR, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Liberia, South Sudan, Sierra Leone and Sudan. During its 1235th meeting in Cairo on 2 October 2024, the PSC recommended further popularisation of the PCRDR through the PCRDR Journal and field missions.

High-Level Seminars on the PCRDR have also created an opportunity to exchange experiences, foster understanding and popularise good practices. On 9–13 November 2021, the AU Commission organised its first High-Level Seminar on PCRDR to coincide with its 15th anniversary, bringing the experiences of over 50 participants.

Conclusion

This study outlined how the PCRDR was launched in Africa in the mid-1970s to respond to post-conflict societies torn by liberation struggles. It also showed Egypt's contribution in the 1980s and 1990s to the concept of sustainable peace by promoting development to address the root causes of conflicts, Boutros-Ghali's New Agenda for Peace and, in the 2000s, with Egypt's chairship of the UNPBC.

The PCRDR was engrained in the 1993 OAU Cairo Declaration, the 1994 Cairo Framework Document and as a mandate of the Cairo Centre for Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa (CCCPA), created in 1994. Egypt has provided leadership in developing the concept through President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, the AU's PCRDR Champion, and advocated for the creation of platforms and mechanisms such as the Aswan Forum, the PSC Sub-Committee on PCRDR, the Cairo-based PCRDR centre, launched in October 2024, and the PCRDR Inter-departmental Committee. It has also coordinated the efforts of the RECs/Regional Mechanisms and civil society organisations, through the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (AU-ECOSOCC) and the Network for Sustainable Peace (NET4Peace), in integrating African principles in peacebuilding.

However, Egypt has not been alone in providing leadership and policy platforms on the PCRDR. Within the AU, other countries have also developed policy platforms and processes to promote PCRDR activities, including the "Tangier Process" on the peace-security nexus; the Biennale Pan-African Forum for the Culture of Peace in Africa in Luanda for the promotion of a culture of peace; the Swakopmund Process on Women, Peace and Security; the Banjul Process on Children in Armed Conflicts; the Bujumbura Process on Youth, Peace and Security; and the Tana Forum Process.

This study also outlined the role of strategic partners such as the World Bank, the UNDP and RECs in the PCRDR policy review and development. It noted the

requirements for sustainable peacebuilding programmes in Africa, including DDR, transitional justice and reconciliation, security sector reforms, and a culture of peace and tolerance. The future of the 2024 PCRDR policy framework will depend on these global partnerships and innovative financing from African financial institutions such as AFSIT, AUDA-NEPAD, African Development Bank and Afreximbank in mobilising resources.

The 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review could provide an opportunity for such partnerships. The AU should also integrate PCRDR advocacy in its Geneva office to reach the larger international humanitarian community as well as integrate the principles of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development of April 2007.

This study calls for a permanent reconceptualisation of PCRDR policies and programmes in line with African principles. First, as “African solutions to African problems”, the ASI, launched in 2012, and the African Solidarity Trust Fund, launched in 2013, should be revived along the lines of the UN Peacebuilding Fund. Moreover, to build on well-established African principles and practices, the idea of an African Special Assistance Fund and the Guarantee and Solidarity Fund for post-conflict societies floated within the OAU between 1975 and 1979 could be revived to finance the AU PCRDR activities. Likewise, the management of QIPs could be inspired by the Rules of Procedures and Guidelines of the OAU CCAR and the BPEAR.

Second, the PCRDR integrates transitional justice and reconciliation based on African principles of conflict management such as the Gacaca in Rwanda. This requires traditional African community-based conflict resolution mechanisms and institutions to be integrated into AU PCRDR programmes and activities. Most importantly, PCRDR programmes in Africa should entail a “whole of society” approach, including women, youth, ex-servicemen and intergenerational dialogue.

Third, PCRDR measures need to be applied in liberated areas or humanitarian corridors while waiting for a generalised ceasefire and peace agreement, as was the case during the liberation wars of the 1960s and in the conflicts in DRC, Mali, Somalia and Sudan. The special needs required for sustainable peace in Africa have resulted in many AU Multidimensional Needs Assessment Missions to countries such as CAR, Burundi and the DRC. This would include mainstreaming youth and gender-friendly activities in DDRRR programmes to address the needs of women ex-combatants, women and children associated with armed groups, women and children affected by conflict, and children born out of conflict-related sexual violence.

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The Right to Development as a Legal Norm in African Peace Agreements: Aspirational or Enforceable?

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ABSTRACT

African peace agreements often articulate the language of development, yet the legal force behind such promises remains uncertain. This study asks whether the right to development (RtD) embedded in these accords – such as those of Sudan, Mozambique and the Central African Republic (CAR) – amounts to binding law or remains a political aspiration. Using a blend of legal interpretation and policy analysis, the article examines the normative strength of the RtD within international law and African Union (AU) frameworks, particularly in light of the 2024 Revised Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD). It situates the debate within Africa's broader quest for sustainable peace and governance, highlighting how development clauses shape legitimacy in post-war transitions. The article argues that although the RtD has often been treated as symbolic, its enforceability can be strengthened through innovative treaty drafting, constitutional incorporation, alignment with the AU's PCRD policy, and robust regional monitoring mechanisms that bridge the gap between normative ambition and lived post-conflict realities.

KEYWORDS

right to development, African peace agreements, post-conflict reconstruction and development

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Introduction

When a war ends in Africa, rebuilding rarely starts with bricks – it begins with words on paper. The clauses on development written into peace agreements often set the tone for what follows. They form the foundation for post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD), addressing the root causes and lingering effects of violence by promoting economic recovery, stability and long-term peace. Such provisions help restore infrastructure, revive public services, and improve livelihoods in war-affected and marginalised communities, fostering inclusion and correcting inequalities that may have fuelled the conflict or deepened in its wake (African Leadership Magazine 2024). They also signal a shared commitment – by national actors and international partners alike – to treat reconstruction and development as integral to peacebuilding. When properly implemented, development-centred agreements rebuild trust between citizens and the state, strengthen social cohesion and reduce the risk of relapse by ensuring that peace dividends are distributed equitably (UNDP 2024). The African Union’s (AU) policy on PCRD – first adopted in 2006 and comprehensively revised in 2024 – provides a practical framework for realising these goals through its eight interlinked pillars: security, humanitarian assistance, governance, socio-economic recovery, human rights and justice, gender, youth, and environmental security (African Union Commission 2006, 2024). Aligning peace accords with these priorities can enable coordinated, sustainable and inclusive recovery across African contexts.

According to a recent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, PCRD initiatives in East Africa that integrate socio-economic development programmes – such as youth employment, education and local governance reform – significantly reduce community vulnerability to conflict and violent extremism (UNDP 2024). The African Development Bank (2023) likewise estimates that African countries lose up to 2% of GDP each year due to conflict, whereas stabilised post-conflict zones attract a marked rise in investment and aid. African Peace Magazine (2023) observes that peacebuilding environments enable governments to shift national spending from military operations to development priorities, improving access to health and education services that restore normalcy and public trust. Between 1990 and 2005 alone, the World Bank calculated conflict-related GDP losses across Africa at approximately US\$284 billion (African Peace Magazine 2023). Similarly, a Wilson Center (2025) policy brief reviewing accords in Côte d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia found that agreements containing clear development clauses, especially those focused on socio-economic inclusion, tended to endure longer and deliver more stable outcomes than those without such provisions (Wilson Center 2025).

Over the past decade, peace agreements across Africa have increasingly adopted the language of development, framing equitable access to resources,

infrastructure and socio-economic justice as essential to lasting peace. The Government of Sudan's (2020) Juba Peace Agreement, for instance, treats sustainable development as a tool to redress historical marginalisation, while the Political Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic (African Union 2019) explicitly commits to equitable public investment and inclusive development planning. In West Africa, several accords go even further, embedding detailed development clauses to address the socio-economic roots of conflict. Article 26 of Sierra Leone's Abidjan Peace Accord (1996) outlines a broad social policy agenda that prioritises rural development, youth employment, education, healthcare, access to clean water and debt relief. The Lomé Peace Agreement (1999) reinforces this by creating a Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, mandating that revenues from diamonds and gold fund public education, health and reconstruction (Article VII). Likewise, Liberia's Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2003) dedicates Article 49 to "Economic and Social Development," establishing frameworks to restore services, rebuild infrastructure and enhance livelihoods through governance and decentralisation reforms.

In contrast, Côte d'Ivoire's Pretoria I Agreement (African Union 2005) contains few development provisions, concentrating mainly on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) alongside political reform. Other landmark accords – such as the Arusha Agreement for Burundi (2000) and the Pretoria Agreement on the Democratic Republic of Congo (2002) – either omit the right to development altogether or mention it only in broad, programmatic terms. The more recent inclusion of development clauses in African peace agreements reflects a growing recognition that structural inequalities, including economic deprivation, are not merely by-products of war but among its root causes (De Waal 2019; Nathan 2020). Taken together, these examples suggest that accords which articulate development obligations in concrete terms – through specific articles, institutions or funding mechanisms – are better equipped to sustain reconstruction and prevent recurrence of conflict. Still, even as many agreements now reference the right to development (RtD), the mechanisms for accountability and legal enforcement often remain vague, leaving the precise normative status of such commitments uncertain (Viljoen 2012).

Situating the Research Question within the Right to Development Debate

This article critically interrogates whether the RtD, when invoked in African peace agreements, functions as a legally binding norm or merely as aspirational rhetoric. To explore this, the study undertakes a comparative legal analysis of three key accords – Sudan's Juba Peace Agreement (Government of Sudan 2020), the Khartoum Political Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic (African Union 2019) and Mozambique's Maputo Accord (2019) –

examining how each formulates, implements and monitors development-related obligations.

The RtD has been a contested yet enduring theme in international law since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development (UNDRTD) (UNGA 1986). Championed by global South states, the Declaration defined development as “an inalienable human right” and called for a fairer international economic order. Its adoption, however, exposed a deep North–South divide: developing countries viewed the RtD as a vehicle for distributive justice and structural reform, whereas many industrialised states questioned both its legal force and the ambiguity of its duty-bearers (Alston 1988; Marks 2004). The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (United Nations 1993: para. 10) later reaffirmed the RtD as “a universal and inalienable right”, yet its implementation remained politically charged, mirroring persistent global inequalities.

Within Africa, the RtD enjoys a strong normative grounding. Article 22 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights recognises the right to both individual and collective economic, social and cultural development. The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights has given this provision tangible meaning in landmark cases such as *Endorois v. Kenya* (ACHPR 2009) and *Ogiek v. Kenya* (ACHPR 2017), linking development to participation, benefit-sharing and cultural integrity. Scholars such as Arjun Sengupta (2002), Upendra Baxi (2007) and James Gathii (2011) underline Africa’s leadership in advancing a solidarity-based, people-centred interpretation of the RtD. Yet much of this literature remains macro level, focused on global distributive justice and international cooperation, while paying limited attention to how the RtD operates inside peace processes or post-conflict governance frameworks.

Peace agreement scholarship, on the other hand, tends to emphasise constitutional design, power-sharing and transitional justice (African Union Commission 2006, 2024; Bell 2006; Broadberry and O’Rourke 2010). Development provisions are often treated as policy gestures rather than enforceable rights. This disconnect reveals a gap between RtD theory and its concrete expression in African peacebuilding practice.

This article aims to close that gap by combining comparative analysis of peace accords with human rights law methodology. It tests whether RtD language in African agreements produces legally recognised obligations or if it functions mainly as rhetorical affirmation. By locating this inquiry within the evolving AU policy on PCRDR (African Union Commission 2006, 2024) and the UNDRTD, the study bridges the normative and operational dimensions of development justice. In doing so, it offers fresh insight into how African peace agreements can transform a contested principle into an actionable framework for equitable and sustainable post-conflict recovery.

Methodologically, the research combines doctrinal legal analysis – reviewing treaty provisions, constitutional clauses and regional normative instruments – with contextual insights drawn from secondary materials such as monitoring reports, UN briefings and scholarly commentary. This mixed approach captures both the formal legal architecture and its real-world application. The discussion first outlines the conceptual and legal foundations of the RtD. It then examines its invocation in selected African peace agreements, evaluates possible avenues for enforceability, and finally proposes recommendations to enhance the RtD’s normative and operational strength in future accords.

Conceptual and Legal Foundations of the Right to Development

Conceptual Framework

The RtD is a fundamental human right that conceptualises development as an inclusive, participatory and equitable process aimed at advancing the well-being of all individuals and communities. It moves beyond the narrow lens of economic growth to embrace social, cultural, political and environmental dimensions, promoting a model of progress that is both sustainable and holistic (Alston 2004). At its heart, the RtD affirms that every individual and all peoples have the right to take part in, contribute to and benefit from the development process (UNGA 1986: Art. 1). In practice, this means that development must expand freedoms, reduce inequality and empower participation. The concept also defines shared responsibilities: national governments are expected to establish policies, laws and institutions that enable equitable development (Alston 2004), while the international community bears a duty to cooperate and remove structural obstacles, especially for poorer nations (UNGA 1986: Art. 3). Ultimately, the RtD unites human rights principles with development objectives, presenting development not merely as a policy aspiration but as a legal and moral right essential to peace, justice and human dignity.

Legal Status in International Law

The RtD emerged from a growing recognition that global inequality, poverty and exclusion undermine both human dignity and international peace. At the international level, it was formally articulated in the UNDRTD, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1986 (A/RES/41/128). Article 1 affirms that “the right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized”. The UNDRTD thus repositions development as a justice-based process grounded in equity and human rights rather than a narrow economic pursuit.

Although the UNDRTD is not a binding treaty and is often described as soft law – lacking direct enforcement mechanisms and operating mainly as a guiding norm – it carries considerable moral and normative influence (Salomon 2011). Its principles have informed subsequent international human-rights frameworks, including the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (United Nations 1993), the Millennium Declaration (UNGA 2000) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNGA 2015). Some scholars contend that this steady reaffirmation is gradually giving the RtD elements of customary international law (Gready 2008). In 2020, the UN Human Rights Council advanced this trajectory by proposing a draft Convention on the RtD (A/HRC/WG.2/21/2/Add.1), intended to move the right from declaratory to binding status. Yet negotiations remain stalled, largely because some global North states continue to resist codification, wary of assuming additional legal obligations for development assistance.

Legal Status in the African Human Rights System

At the regional level, the African human rights system – particularly the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights – has gone further in giving the RtD a formal legal foundation. Article 22 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) provides that “all peoples shall have the right to their economic, social and cultural development with due regard to their freedom and identity and in the equal enjoyment of the common heritage of mankind”. Article 22(2) further obliges States Parties to “ensure the exercise of the right to development”, both individually and collectively. This obligation is legally binding on all AU member states that have ratified the Charter (ACHPR 1981). The African Charter on the Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration (2011) complements this by linking development with good governance and effective public service delivery.

Other regional instruments have extended the reach of the RtD to specific groups. Article 19 of the Maputo Protocol (African Union 2003) guarantees women the right to sustainable development and requires states to secure equitable access to land, credit and social services. Likewise, Article 10 of the African Youth Charter (African Union 2006) affirms that “every young person shall have the right to development”, mandating policies that promote participation, education and employment. The Kampala Convention (African Union 2009) is also development-relevant: Article 3(1)(j) calls on states to “create and maintain conditions conducive to the voluntary return, local integration or relocation of internally displaced persons in a dignified and safe manner”, while Article 11(5) commits them to “promote and facilitate sustainable livelihoods and economic development in areas of displacement and return”. These provisions align closely with the substance of the RtD, even when the term itself is not explicitly invoked.

Beyond these instruments, AU policy frameworks repeatedly reaffirm the RtD as a core pillar of peace and reconstruction across the continent. Chief among them, Agenda 2063 – the AU’s long-term framework for inclusive growth – elevates the RtD as a cornerstone for integration, prosperity and peace (African Union 2015). Its goal of ending poverty, inequality and marginalisation reinforces development not merely as a policy aspiration but as a normative duty under AU law. The first aspiration – “A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development” – captures the very essence of the RtD: a vision of collective well-being and shared responsibility between governments and their citizens (African Union 2015).

Similarly, the AU PCRDR policy, first adopted in 2006 and revised in 2024, positions development and human security as essential foundations for sustainable peacebuilding. Among its eight pillars, those on socio-economic reconstruction and development, political governance and transition, human rights, justice and reconciliation, and human security most clearly translate the RtD into practice. They connect equitable growth, participatory governance and the protection of human dignity with the pursuit of durable peace. In doing so, the PCRDR policy reframes development from a distant aspiration into a concrete peacebuilding priority that emphasises inclusion, socio-economic renewal and the empowerment of vulnerable groups.

The AU Sahel Regional Strategy (African Union 2014) builds on this vision, identifying development, resilience and state-building as mutually reinforcing objectives in regions marked by chronic instability. It integrates economic recovery, infrastructure development and youth empowerment into conflict-resolution processes, giving the RtD a distinctly strategic and programmatic dimension within African security policy. Taken together, these frameworks reveal how the RtD has evolved into both a normative and strategic imperative within the AU Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

Yet, enforcement of these provisions remains uneven, and direct jurisprudence on their application is rare. The African human rights architecture, particularly the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, provides a legal avenue for interpreting and potentially enforcing the RtD. Although few cases have directly invoked Article 22 of the ACHPR, the broader body of jurisprudence of these institutions has affirmed socio-economic rights in practice. For instance, in the landmark case of *Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC) and Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) v. Nigeria* (ACHPR 2001), the Commission held that Nigeria had violated the rights to health and development by failing to regulate the oil industry’s impact on the Ogoni people. Though not framed explicitly as an RtD case, the decision reinforced the justiciability of development-related claims under the Charter. While approximately 58 cases alleging violations have been brought before various African

human rights systems, merit-based decisions are sparse. For example, the cases of *Front for the Liberation of the State of Cabinda v. Angola*, *Kevin Mgwanga Gunme et al. v. Cameroon* and *Association pour la sauvegarde de la paix au Burundi v. Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zaire (DRC), and Zambia* involved claims of violations of the RtD, but these claims were not established on the merits.

For its part, the African Court has been more cautious but has affirmed the importance of state obligations regarding collective development. In *African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights v. Kenya* (ACHPR 2017), the African Court held that Kenya violated the Ogiek community's RtD under Article 22 of the African Charter by denying them access to ancestral lands and excluding them from decisions affecting their development.

At the subregional levels, about 22 cases evoked the RtD. In *Hassan Abdou (or Hassane Abdou Nouhou) v. Niger*, before the ECOWAS Court of Justice (2023), for example, the applicant – representing 260 families in Danki – contended that Niger's continued tolerance of serfdom and denial of land ownership to descendants of former slaves violated their fundamental rights. The court agreed that these restrictions also violated the families' right to economic, social and cultural development under Article 22 of the ACHPR.

The shortage of clear jurisprudence on the RtD continues to hinder its evolution from a normative ideal into a practical tool for accountability in peacebuilding contexts (Kindornay and Twigg 2015; Viljoen 2012). Enforcement remains weak. Structural constraints within the African human rights system – such as chronic underfunding, delayed implementation of decisions, and limited access to the African Court – further restrict the effective realisation of the RtD. Even so, the growing normative and institutional infrastructure suggests steady movement toward the legalisation of development rights in African contexts, especially where these intersect with peace and reconstruction efforts.

As African peace agreements increasingly incorporate language on development and reconstruction, these legal foundations provide an entry point for assessing whether such provisions can be interpreted – and enforced – as extensions of the RtD under regional and international law. Nonetheless, significant gaps persist between principle and practice, largely because institutional mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and judicial review remain weak or absent.

It should be recalled that, in international law, the force of a norm depends not only on formal enforcement but also on its acceptance as a legally relevant standard of conduct. Legal norms evolve along a continuum – from soft law, such as declarations and resolutions, to hard law embodied in treaties and judicial decisions (Boyle 2012; Shelton 2000). The RtD sits somewhere between these

poles. Although the 1986 UNDRTD is non-binding, its consistent reaffirmation in UN General Assembly resolutions, the Vienna Declaration (United Nations 1993), and its incorporation in Article 22 of the ACHPR have given it increasing normative weight (Marks 2004; Sengupta 2002). In practice, enforcement occurs mainly through interpretive and cooperative mechanisms – such as the UN Working Group on the RtD, the Universal Periodic Review, and regional bodies like the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. While still evolving, the RtD is now widely used as a normative reference point guiding state behaviour in peacebuilding and reconstruction, providing a basis for examining its role in African peace agreements.

Normative Role of the Right to Development in African Peace Agreements

The integration of the RtD within African peace agreements marks a significant step in the evolution of post-conflict reconstruction. Beyond securing a cessation of hostilities, these agreements increasingly acknowledge that lasting peace depends on addressing the structural roots of conflict – most often poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. This section explores the normative function of the RtD, examining how its principles are embedded and translated into operational commitments across African peace accords. It considers how these provisions contribute to long-term stability, social justice and inclusive economic growth. The analysis also reviews the frequency and framing of RtD language, the typology of development commitments, and the ways in which such clauses function both symbolically and legally within peace processes.

Frequency and Form of RtD Language

Over the past two decades, development-oriented provisions have become increasingly prominent in African peace agreements, including those concluded in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR). This evolution reflects a growing awareness that underdevelopment and structural inequality are not merely outcomes of conflict but among its primary causes (De Waal 2019; Nathan 2020). A review of recent accords shows that, even when the RtD is not explicitly mentioned, the language and logic of development now permeate most major African peace agreements, shaping their priorities and framing the link between justice, governance and economic recovery.

In the Juba Peace Agreement (Government of Sudan 2020) signed between the transitional government of Sudan and several rebel movements, development features as a recurring theme. The agreement establishes a Fund for Development and Reconstruction of the Darfur Region (Art. 2, Darfur Track) and emphasises equitable distribution of resources, access to services and infrastructure investment, particularly in the historically marginalised Darfur, South Kordofan

and Blue Nile states (Art. 4, National Issues Agreement). While the agreement references “economic and social development” (Appendix: Humanitarian and Development Provisions) as a peacebuilding goal, it stops short of framing development as an enforceable right (Government of Sudan 2020).

Similarly, the Political Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic (African Union 2019) places a strong emphasis on development in both its preamble and operative clauses. Article 1(e) commits the parties to “promoting balanced and equitable development of all regions of the Central African Republic, taking into account the potential of each region”, while Article 4(n) obliges the government to ensure the “fair and equitable distribution of national wealth” through the allocation of fiscal resources and investment in regional development. The agreement also links development to reintegration, calling for the inclusion of ex-combatants in socio-economic projects within the DDR framework. Though the agreement reflects a commitment to equity and inclusive governance, there is again a lack of explicit reference to the RtD as framed in Article 22 of the ACHPR, thereby limiting its normative enforceability under regional human rights law.

The Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation (2019) in Mozambique exemplifies the growing integration of development within peace processes. Its preamble commits the parties to “social and economic development, progress, and the well-being of everyone” as a foundation for lasting peace. The operative clauses link the DDR of ex-combatants to “socio-economic reintegration...and placement in civilian structures” (Art. 1 b) and call for a “legislative package on decentralization” to redress historical disparities. Although the agreement highlights infrastructure investment, agricultural development and improved service delivery in the central and northern provinces, these goals are framed as elements of national reconciliation rather than enforceable legal rights.

The Gambia’s peace agreements and transitional justice processes do not explicitly refer to the RtD. Yet, many of its core elements – such as inclusive development, access to justice, reparations, and broad participation in political and economic life – are reflected in the country’s post-conflict recovery efforts. The Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) Act (2017), particularly Articles 13–15, provides for reparations, institutional reform and guarantees of non-recurrence, all of which advance equitable and sustainable development. The government’s White Paper on the TRRC Recommendations (May 2022, Sections 3.2 and 5.4) reinforces these commitments through inclusive governance, social justice and economic reintegration programmes. Together, these measures embody the RtD’s principles of participation, equality and shared benefit under Article 22 of the ACHPR, and align with the socio-economic reconstruction and human rights pillars of the AU’s PCRDR policy (African Union

Commission 2006, 2024). In this sense, The Gambia's transitional justice framework offers a tangible expression of the RtD through its focus on restorative justice, inclusion and equitable recovery.

Thus, although development is frequently referenced in African peace agreements, its formulation varies – from broad policy aspirations to more targeted measures for post-war recovery. What remains limited, however, is a clear and binding recognition of the RtD as a justiciable right. Even so, its recurring inclusion across multiple peace accords points to an emerging treaty-based practice that, while still largely aspirational, signals a gradual shift toward stronger legal recognition in both regional and national contexts.

Typology of Development Commitments

A typology analysis of development commitments in African peace accords reveals three recurring patterns: socio-economic rights clauses, infrastructure and service delivery promises, and transitional development assistance.

Socio-economic rights clauses frequently address access to education, health, housing and livelihoods. In Sudan's Juba Peace Agreement (Government of Sudan 2020), such provisions are framed as restorative justice measures for marginalised regions. Article 26.1 affirms that "the Government of Sudan shall commit to mandatory and free public education...eliminating gaps...particularly in the war-affected and least developed areas"; underscoring the link between recovery and equitable development. Likewise, Article 8.6 guarantees that "male and female IDPs [internally displaced persons] and refugees...shall have the right to restore any houses, lands, or farms that they have been arbitrarily or illegally deprived of"; while Title 6, Articles 3.1–3.2, direct the government to prioritise rural development through service programmes, displacement support and health centres, including maternity and childcare facilities. Together, these provisions reinforce central elements of the RtD. Yet, despite their normative strength, such clauses often lack clear implementation mechanisms or explicit reference to existing national or international obligations.

Infrastructure and service delivery promises are common features of African peace agreements, yet they are typically expressed as broad policy goals rather than binding legal duties. In the CAR's Political Accord for Peace and Reconciliation (African Union 2019), Article 35 calls on the government to "rehabilitate and develop basic infrastructure and public services, particularly in areas affected by conflict"; committing to rebuild transport and communication networks without specifying timelines, financial guarantees or monitoring mechanisms. Similarly, Articles 20 and 21 of Mozambique's Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation (2019) pledge to "implement development programs, including rural electrification and road construction, in areas affected by the conflict". Yet

these clauses also omit clear budgets, schedules and oversight structures, illustrating the tendency of such provisions to frame infrastructure as a policy aspiration rather than an enforceable right.

Transitional development assistance, typically channelled through international donor mechanisms or trust funds, is among the most operationalised yet externally driven forms of development in peace agreements. In Sudan's Juba Peace Agreement (Government of Sudan 2020: Art. 71), the parties call for an "International Partners' Conference" to mobilise resources for reconstruction and development in war-affected regions. Likewise, South Sudan's Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict (2018: Art. 4.2) establishes a framework for "Transitional Development Assistance" to coordinate donor support for peacebuilding and reconstruction. In both cases, however, much of the financing is controlled by external actors – international organisations and financial institutions – limiting state ownership, weakening accountability, and undermining the sustainability of development outcomes within national frameworks (Bell and Wise 2021).

Across these categories, a recurring pattern is the tendency to conflate development programming with rights. While both are central to peacebuilding, this blurring can obscure whether beneficiaries hold enforceable entitlements or merely policy expectations. The same ambiguity appears in RtD provisions within peace agreements, where the boundary between legal obligation and political aspiration often remains indistinct.

Symbolic vs. Legal Function

The key challenge lies in determining whether development clauses in African peace agreements perform a symbolic or a legal function. Many appear programmatic, outlining aspirations rather than binding obligations or enforceable rights. This is evident in the frequent use of soft language – terms such as "commit to", "promote" or "strive toward" – which carries little of the normative weight found in rights-based instruments (Sandler 2019).

Even where provisions are more specific, they rarely achieve justiciability. Most accords fail to identify duty-bearers, timelines or avenues for redress. For example, the CAR's Political Accord for Peace and Reconciliation declares that "all citizens must benefit equally from public investment"; yet provides no legal remedy if this commitment is ignored (African Union 2019). Likewise, Mozambique's Maputo Accord highlights rural electrification and infrastructure development without assigning responsibility, deadlines or complaint procedures. In Sudan's Juba Peace Agreement, commitments to restore services in marginalised areas are not matched by mechanisms of accountability or legal enforcement, weakening their practical effect.

Some scholars contend that this symbolic framing can still serve a purpose in negotiation, helping to build consensus among former belligerents and signal legitimacy to the public (Bell 2006). Yet without credible systems for monitoring and enforcement, such promises risk remaining rhetorical.

There are, however, emerging exceptions. The Sudanese Constitutional Charter (2019), adopted alongside the peace process, enshrines socio-economic rights in binding language, creating potential avenues for judicial enforcement. Similarly, Article 22 of the ACHPR offers a normative foundation that could, if invoked, be pursued through the African Court or domestic constitutional systems, though precedent remains limited.

Overall, the legal force of development provisions is weak but not absent. Imprecise drafting and the political fragility of transitional regimes continue to undermine their enforceability. Strengthening normative clarity and accountability in future peace agreements will depend as much on political commitment as on technical legal reform.

Case Studies of Development Clauses in Peace Agreements

This section analyses development clauses, particularly those reflecting RtD, that are articulated and implemented within African peace agreements. To illustrate the diverse applications and challenges, three case studies are examined – Sudan, CAR and Mozambique. They were selected for their distinct conflict histories, peace trajectories, and explicit inclusion of development-related provisions in their accords. Sudan offers insights into complex power-sharing and resource allocation challenges; the CAR illustrates recurring instability and the struggle for state-building with developmental implications; and Mozambique exemplifies a post-conflict recovery trajectory centred on economic and social reconstruction. Together, these cases provide a nuanced understanding of the normative influence and practical implications of the RtD in shaping sustainable peace across Africa.

Central African Republic

The Khartoum Accord (African Union 2019) sought to end the protracted conflict in the CAR, emphasising inclusive governance and equitable development as foundations for lasting peace. It explicitly commits to “ensure equitable distribution of resources, reconstruction of infrastructure, and development of all regions without discrimination” (Art. 15), framing development as central to political stability and national reconciliation, particularly for marginalised communities historically excluded from state resources.

Despite these progressive provisions, implementation has been uneven. Fragile security conditions, ongoing militia activity and weak state capacity have

slowed progress and limited tangible outcomes. Donor dependency has further complicated the process: international partners – through the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and development agencies – provide essential funding but often attach conditionalities that, while enhancing transparency, risk undermining local ownership and delaying domestically driven agendas (International Crisis Group 2021).

The absence of strong accountability mechanisms within the accord has left development commitments largely aspirational. Civil society and opposition actors have criticised the lack of transparent resource allocation, noting persistent regional disparities despite formal promises (Human Rights Watch 2022). These dynamics expose the gap between the legal commitments contained in peace accords and their translation into concrete development outcomes amid fragile political and security contexts.

Sudan

Sudan's Juba Peace Agreement (Government of Sudan 2020) is a landmark accord uniting the transitional government and multiple rebel factions to address decades of conflict in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile – collectively known as the "Two Areas". It places development at the centre of the peace agenda, linking socio-economic justice to the redress of historical marginalisation and to the foundations of lasting stability.

The agreement's development protocols commit to funding reconstruction, improving health and education infrastructure, and ensuring equitable political participation. Article 5 establishes a Reconstruction and Development Fund for war-affected areas, financed through state budgets and international donors (Government of Sudan 2020). By recognising underdevelopment as both a cause and a consequence of conflict, the accord frames equitable growth as a foundational right essential to sustainable peace.

Despite these progressive provisions, implementation has been slow. The transitional government's limited capacity, persistent insecurity and constrained fiscal resources continue to impede progress. Donor fatigue and shifting global priorities have further undermined sustainable financing (UNDP 2024). The heavy reliance on external funding, coupled with weak enforcement mechanisms, underscores the difficulty of transforming normative commitments into enforceable rights.

Scholars observe that while the Juba Agreement invokes the RtD, it does so in aspirational language rather than creating justiciable claims or judicial oversight (Bell and Wise 2021). The potential for African human rights institutions to invoke Article 22 of the ACHPR remains largely untapped, revealing broader structural limits in enforcing socio-economic rights in post-conflict contexts.

Mozambique

Mozambique's peacebuilding trajectory offers a longer-term view of how development guarantees have been integrated into post-conflict recovery. The Rome General Peace Accord (1992), which ended the civil war between Frelimo and Renamo, established the foundations for national reconciliation and socio-economic reconstruction. Its commitments focused on demobilisation and reintegration of combatants, rebuilding infrastructure and restoring essential public services. Although it did not explicitly reference the RtD, the accord implicitly recognised development as essential for durable peace (Vines 1996).

The later Maputo Accord (2019), which renewed commitments between the government and Renamo after renewed hostilities, reflects a more deliberate integration of development as a peacebuilding instrument. It contains detailed provisions on the shared use and management of natural resources, particularly in agriculture and forestry, acknowledging their importance for livelihoods and economic stability. The accord also prioritises the decentralisation of state resources to promote equitable regional growth, addressing long-standing inequalities and competition over resources.

Mozambique's experience highlights both the potential and the difficulty of using development as a foundation for peace. Its focus on shared resource management offers a model for linking economic cooperation with reconciliation, yet persistent corruption, uneven project implementation and enduring socio-economic disparities continue to threaten long-term stability (World Bank 2020).

These case studies collectively show that although development language is now firmly embedded in African peace agreements, its conversion from normative commitment to enforceable right remains inconsistent. This gap reflects weak domestic legal harmonisation, political sensitivities around sovereignty and resource distribution, and the dominance of donor-driven programmes over rights-based frameworks. Contextual politics, institutional capacity and external influence further shape these outcomes. Overall, the findings highlight the need for clearer legal standards and stronger accountability mechanisms to give real effect to the RtD in post-conflict contexts.

Legal and Institutional Pathways to Enforceability

For the RtD to move beyond aspiration, its realisation depends on the creation of strong legal and institutional frameworks. This section examines how RtD commitments, particularly those embedded in African peace agreements, can be translated into enforceable rights and obligations. It considers the interaction between international legal instruments, domestic legislative reforms, and the establishment of dedicated institutions as key avenues for accountability and

redress. The goal is to identify practical pathways to operationalise the RtD, enhancing its normative authority and contributing to sustainable peace and justice in post-conflict African states.

Constitutional Incorporation

One of the most direct ways to make the RtD legally enforceable is through its inclusion in national constitutions. Several African states have embedded socio-economic rights, including the RtD or related guarantees, into their constitutional texts, creating domestic legal grounds for accountability.

South Africa's 1996 Constitution recognises rights to housing, healthcare and social security, which the Constitutional Court has interpreted as development-oriented entitlements (Constitutional Court of South Africa 2000; Government of South Africa 1996). Likewise, Kenya's 2010 Constitution guarantees the right to development under Article 43, ensuring citizens access to economic and social rights essential to human dignity.

Although the RtD as articulated in international law is seldom cited verbatim, the constitutional recognition of socio-economic rights establishes an enabling framework for enforcing development commitments. Ultimately, the impact of such incorporation depends on active judicial interpretation and effective access to remedies that can translate constitutional promises into enforceable rights.

Treaty-Based Innovations

Beyond constitutional law, peace agreements can embed binding development obligations through innovative treaty design. This often takes the form of detailed implementation protocols, annexes or supplementary instruments outlining development benchmarks, funding commitments and monitoring frameworks. For instance, Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (Government of Sudan and SPLM/A 2005) contained annexes on wealth and power sharing, obliging parties to equitably distribute oil revenues and reconstruction resources. These provisions functioned as contractual obligations, making deviation legally contestable in both national and international fora. More recent accords increasingly establish monitoring committees and joint commissions to oversee development projects and ensure compliance. Such mechanisms provide both legal and political means of accountability, enhancing the justiciability of development commitments. Their success, however, ultimately depends on sustained donor engagement and the political will of signatory parties.

Role of Regional Bodies

Regional institutions are central to reinforcing the enforceability of development commitments in peace agreements. The AU, through its Peace and Security Council (PSC), monitors post-conflict transitions and may impose sanctions or mandate corrective measures in cases of non-compliance (African Union Protocol Relating to the PSC 2002). It also advances normative frameworks such as the ACHPR, which enshrines the RtD under Article 22.

Sub-regional organisations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) possess both legal and political instruments for enforcing peace agreements that include development components. ECOWAS, for instance, has adjudicated socio-economic rights cases through its Community Court of Justice, setting precedents for the justiciability of development-related rights (ECOWAS Treaty 1993; ECOWAS Court of Justice 2010). Similarly, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights has expanded its jurisprudence to cover socio-economic claims, interpreting Article 22 in cases concerning resource distribution and access to essential services (ACHPR 2001). Although no ruling has yet imposed direct development obligations arising from peace accords, these decisions provide a normative foundation for future enforcement.

Despite such progress, challenges persist – limited jurisdiction, political interference and financial constraints continue to weaken regional accountability. Enhancing the capacity and authority of these bodies remains vital for transforming normative commitments into binding legal outcomes and ensuring the realisation of the RtD in post-conflict Africa.

Revised AU PCRDR Policy as an Enforcement Pathway

The AU's PCRDR policy (African Union Commission 2006, 2024) offers a practical framework for translating the RtD into enforceable post-conflict commitments. Although not legally binding, it functions as a soft-law instrument whose six pillars – security, humanitarian assistance, political governance, socio-economic reconstruction, human rights and justice, and gender – embed development as a core peacebuilding obligation. By promoting inclusive participation, equitable resource distribution and institutional accountability, the PCRDR bridges RtD principles with their implementation. When peace agreements and national recovery frameworks align with its provisions, the policy serves as a quasi-legal pathway for operationalising the RtD through AU and Regional Economic Community (REC) mechanisms. Strengthening its domestication and monitoring could enhance accountability and help transform development pledges in peace processes from political declarations into enforceable rights.

Challenges to Justiciability and Enforcement

Despite the growing inclusion of the RtD in African peace agreements, several obstacles continue to impede its legal enforceability and practical implementation. These challenges arise across legal, institutional, political and financial domains, collectively constraining post-conflict societies' ability to transform development commitments into binding rights.

Lack of Legal Precision in Drafting Development Provisions

A central barrier to justiciability is the vague and aspirational language used to frame development clauses in peace accords. Many agreements refer broadly to "inclusive development," "equitable resource sharing" or "socio-economic reconstruction" without specifying measurable obligations, timelines or sanctions for non-compliance. Such imprecision weakens the enforceability of the RtD, making it difficult for courts or oversight bodies to interpret and hold parties accountable (de Coning and Ndulo 2021; Nathan 2020). Without clear benchmarks, development provisions risk remaining symbolic rather than actionable.

Weak Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

Enforcement also depends on credible monitoring institutions capable of tracking progress and addressing violations. Yet many peace agreements create bodies that lack independence, resources or sanctioning authority. Joint commissions are often underfunded or politically constrained, limiting their capacity to respond when parties fail to meet obligations (Mamdani 2018). This institutional fragility leaves enforcement gaps, denying victims effective remedies and allowing states or factions to evade accountability.

Political Will and Resource Constraints

Even where legal frameworks exist, implementation hinges on political will. Post-conflict leaders may sideline development pledges in pursuit of short-term political stability or elite patronage. In addition, chronic resource scarcity limits states' capacity to deliver on reconstruction and development promises (World Bank 2022). As a result, the RtD risks being reduced to rhetoric, particularly when donor agendas dominate the allocation of scarce funds.

Donor vs. State-Led Development Priorities

The tension between sovereignty and donor influence further complicates enforcement. Peace agreements frequently depend on external funding and technical assistance, yet donor priorities may diverge from national needs, producing fragmented or unsustainable interventions (Richmond 2011).

Conditionalities attached to aid can weaken state ownership and accountability, undermining efforts to realise the RtD as a collective, domestically grounded right.

Recommendations for Future Peace Agreement Design

To strengthen the legal enforceability and practical realisation of the RtD in African peace agreements, several reforms are needed. These measures aim to move development commitments beyond aspirational language toward actionable and accountable obligations that sustain long-term peace.

Drafting Legally Precise Development Obligations

Peace agreements should include clearly defined development clauses with measurable targets and timelines. Moving from vague pledges to precise commitments on resource allocation, infrastructure and service delivery would clarify parties' responsibilities and enable judicial or quasi-judicial interpretation. Legal precision transforms development provisions into enforceable obligations rather than rhetorical goals (Nathan 2020).

Embedding the RtD in Enforcement and Monitoring Provisions

Strong institutional frameworks must accompany development clauses. Independent monitoring bodies with clear mandates should oversee compliance and address violations, while enforcement mechanisms must specify consequences for non-compliance, including dispute-resolution procedures and potential sanctions. Explicitly integrating the RtD into these monitoring systems ensures that development is treated as central to peace implementation, not an ancillary concern (de Coning and Ndulo 2021). The AU PCRD policy (African Union Commission 2006, 2024) already offers a continental framework for tracking post-conflict recovery through its pillars on governance, reconstruction and human rights. Aligning peace agreement monitoring with PCRD evaluation tools – such as AU–REC joint reviews and national recovery plans – would enhance accountability and coherence across Africa's peacebuilding architecture.

Leveraging the AU and RECs

Continental and regional bodies such as the AU, ECOWAS and IGAD can reinforce enforcement through political oversight, technical support and legal instruments. The AU PSC and related entities should incorporate development benchmarks into peacebuilding frameworks and encourage compliance through diplomatic incentives or conditionalities. The revised PCRD policy (2024) already integrates development benchmarks, accountability indicators and gender-responsive programming into national strategies, providing a ready vehicle for implementing RtD-based clauses. Strengthening coordination between states and RECs will

enhance the normative weight of development obligations within broader governance systems (African Union 2017).

Linking Peace Implementation Funds to Measurable Development Benchmarks

International donors and peace funds should tie disbursements to verifiable development milestones, ensuring that financial support corresponds to progress on socio-economic rights and reconstruction. Such conditionality promotes accountability and aligns donor priorities with the RtD, directing resources toward inclusive, locally driven recovery (World Bank 2022).

By adopting these measures, future African peace agreements can more effectively translate the RtD, an aspirational principle, into a legally enforceable pillar of peace and justice. Embedding these frameworks within the AU's PCRD policy will help transform the RtD from a normative ideal into a practical, accountable mechanism for post-conflict governance.

Conclusion

The RtD occupies a complex space within African peace agreements, balanced between its aspirational promise and the challenges of legal enforceability. This analysis shows that while it is often invoked as a symbol of equitable growth and post-conflict justice, implementation remains limited by vague drafting, weak accountability and insufficient political will (de Coning and Ndulo 2021; Nathan 2020). These shortcomings largely reflect sovereignty concerns, donor-driven agendas, and the absence of institutions capable of converting soft-law commitments into binding obligations.

Findings from Sudan, the CAR and Mozambique indicate that peace agreements with concrete development clauses and clear implementation benchmarks tend to foster stronger accountability and more durable peace outcomes. Through constitutional incorporation, innovative treaty design and stronger regional enforcement mechanisms, however, the RtD can evolve beyond rhetoric into a legally binding commitment (African Union 2017; World Bank 2022). Elevating development from declaratory language to enforceable obligation is essential for addressing structural inequalities and sustaining peace. Looking ahead, African peace processes must embed clear, actionable development guarantees within robust institutional frameworks to ensure that peace accords deliver tangible socio-economic progress for all.

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The AU Revised Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Policy: Fixing the Disconnect for Peace, Security and Sustainable Growth

Prosper Nii Nortey Addo¹

ABSTRACT

The African Union (AU) has aspired towards a united, integrated, peaceful and developed Africa since its establishment. However, these aspirations have not been adequately realised, despite significant efforts made thus far, including the initiation of the AU's Agenda 2063 as a blueprint for inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development. There are many reasons for this disconnect between peace, security and development: dependencies created by neocolonialism, bad governance practices, conflicts, transnational organised crime and climate change impacts. These factors contribute to divisions and disunity, which undermines the common goal of continental unity and integration. This article emphasises development as a fundamental right and a prerequisite for peace, security and stability in Africa. This can be achieved by focusing on the AU's revised Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development policy as a comprehensive peacebuilding and conflict prevention tool, and exploring options for bridging the peacebuilding and development gap in post-conflict settings and transitions. The article argues for a reinforced African Solidarity Initiative in response to the disconnect, reflecting "African solutions to African problems" by "Africa helping Africa"; and minimising dependence in striving towards state-building goals and objectives.

KEYWORDS

Africa, peacebuilding, development, solidarity, social cohesion

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Introduction

Africa as a continent has suffered many past abuses and has strived to overcome this past, which includes slavery, colonialism, apartheid and genocide (AU 2015; Ukpei 2024). These historical injustices have contributed to the many conflicts, governance challenges, poverty, transnational organised crimes and divisions across the continent, exacerbated by ethnic, social and cultural factors (Agyei 2024). This has caused disunity, instability, injustices and a lack of social cohesion.

Conflicts in particular have undermined the prospects for growth and development on the continent. As part of its response to these challenges, the African Union (AU) introduced the Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy framework to respond to post-conflict recovery and reconstruction challenges, as well as Agenda 2063, which has aspirations towards an integrated, peaceful and developed continent (AU 2006, 2015).

The AU PCRD policy framework, developed in The Gambia in 2006, sought to improve peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts through peacebuilding programmes towards state-building and development (AU 2024a). This was to be achieved through implementing a comprehensive post-conflict recovery and reconstruction programme, comprising projects and activities designed to address the root causes of conflicts and prevent a relapse into violence (AU 2024a). Doing this would consolidate peace and facilitate sustainable growth and development of AU member states emerging from conflicts after their period of transition.

Similarly, the AU's Agenda 2063 provided a broader, inclusive, transformative and sustainable development framework with relevant aspirations to meet the desired objectives. The Agenda was conceived in 2013 after African leaders recognised the need to refocus and reprioritise Africa's agenda from a liberated, independent and united continent to achieving its sustainable development goals (Akinola and Khabele 2025; AU 2015). AU member states, the AU Commission, the private sector and civil society, with support from partners and donors, have the responsibility to contribute to realising the vision of the "Africa We Want" (AU 2015). This has not, however, been the case.

Post-conflict countries have faced major challenges in funding their PCRD programmes and activities. This was exemplified in the several PCRD assessment missions undertaken in eight post-conflict countries: Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Sudan.² Pledges were made by AU member

2 See AU PSC 352nd meeting First Progress Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on AU's Efforts on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development in Africa, PSC/PR/2(CCCLII) of 16 January 2013, pp. 2–4. <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/psc-352-report-pcrd-16-01-2013.pdf>

states to support these PCRD programmes in the African Solidarity Initiative (ASI)³ Pledging Conference held in Addis Ababa on 1 February 2014, but without much success. As a result, the AU Peace and Security Council expressed deep concern about the AU Commission and AU member states not honouring their commitments.⁴

The inability to mobilise internal resources on the continent has perpetuated dependence on donor countries to fund AU PCRD activities. However, the funding is either limited or does not come as expected. Official development assistance (ODA) projections by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) indicate a 9%–17% drop in the year 2025, compared to the 9% drop in 2024. Least developed countries (LDCs) and sub-Saharan African countries are expected to have a 13%–25% fall in net bilateral ODA from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (OECD 2025). This indicates a negative impact on major sectors of the economy, as well as support for peace operations, humanitarian relief, and post-conflict reconstruction and development efforts across the continent.

With specific reference to peace and security, the African Peace Facility (APF), established in December 2003, was funded by the European Development Fund (EDF). The overall objective of the APF was to support peace, security and stability in Africa, while providing the basis for sustainable development under the principle of African ownership (African Peace Facility 2020). With major funding coming from the European Union (EU), the APF was eventually replaced by the European Peace Facility (EPF) in 2021 for military and defence-related funding (African Peace Facility 2020). These developments obviously undermine PCRD efforts on the continent.

The continent continues to grapple with the challenge of achieving unity, peace, security and development. Collective efforts need to be made to address these problems, along the lines of the Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) 1975 Inter-African Convention Establishing an African Technical Cooperation Programme to pool resources within the continent to address challenges collectively in the spirit of African solidarity (OAU 1975). This will reinforce the notion of "African solutions to African problems" in which Africa must strive to help Africa (Mkhize et al. 2024). While support by partners is essential, the collective will, determination and use of continental resources will go a long way to address the many challenges besetting the continent.

This article focuses on addressing the challenge of bridging the peacebuilding and sustainable growth and development gaps in Africa. It proposes rejuvenating

3 For more on ASI, see <https://www.peaceau.org/en/topic/the-african-solidarity-initiative-asi>.

4 AU PSC Communique PSC/PR/COMM.(DXCIII) of the 593rd meeting held on 26 April 2016, pp. 2–3.

the ASI as one way to do this. The AU's (2024a) revised PCRDR policy is reviewed by looking at its value addition for facilitating post-conflict recovery efforts to address the root causes of conflicts and prevent a relapse into violence. The article then looks at the ASI, what went wrong and how this can be rectified for promoting peacebuilding, sustainable growth and development in Africa.

The Revised AU PCRDR Policy, 2024

The AU PCRDR policy framework adopted by the Heads of State and Government in 2006 entailed a comprehensive and multidimensional set of measures to address the root causes of conflicts, facilitate recovery and reconstruction efforts, consolidate peace, and prevent relapse into violence. It was tailored towards addressing the security, political and transitional, humanitarian, human rights, transitional justice, and women and gender needs of societies emerging from conflicts (AU 2006).

Its underlying principles of African leadership, national and local ownership, inclusiveness, equity, non-discrimination, cooperation, coherence and capacity building promote home-grown and collaborative approaches to addressing post-conflict needs in the short, medium and long term. It was meant to facilitate the successful implementation of Peace Strengthening Programmes and Projects (PSPs) in stable environments, as well as Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in humanitarian emergencies. It was crafted as a critical tool for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Africa (Addo 2012).

The policy emphasised the adoption of a hybrid approach, through formal and informal strategies, for post-conflict peacebuilding. This was reflected in the principles emphasising African leadership, traditional African conflict resolution mechanisms and institutions, national and local ownership of programmes and activities, as well as engagement and re-engagement of the whole population, particularly vulnerable groups such as women, children and the youth (AU 2006).

The hybrid approach is further reinforced in the AU's revised policy. It focuses on state and non-state partnerships, which are critical to the success of PCRDR, as well as leveraging the unique and diverse roles of civil society organisations, and the involvement of the African diaspora in resource mobilisation (AU 2024a). The importance of shared objectives between local, national and international partners is highlighted, in addition to building local capacities in the process based on African norms, values and belief systems.

The liberal peace concept holds that democratic states observing democratic principles such as human rights, and having free markets and strong institutions, are less likely to go to war (Mac Ginty 2008). However, the adoption of a Western-based model of top-down approaches to peacebuilding may not necessarily be

effective in contexts where political, social and cultural conditions differ, and where formal and informal institutions coexist due to colonial influences (Fukuyama 2004).

A review of the 2006 AU PCRDR policy thus became necessary to address challenges related to adopting linear approaches to peacebuilding despite changing and varying contexts, limited funding from continental and regional organisations, major dependence on international partners and donors, and climate change factors that exacerbate conflict (AU 2024a; Chandler 2017; Lake 2016).

The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) called for a review of the policy to align it with changing trends and new developments. In its communique of the 958th meeting held on 23 October 2020 on PCRDR in Africa, the PSC underscored the changing dynamics of the post-conflict context. It noted the need for the PCRDR policy framework to embrace a broad spectrum of efforts to enhance the outcomes of peacebuilding and state-building goals: conflict prevention and management, stabilisation and recovery, and reconstruction and development (AU 2024a). Efforts were thus initiated to review the policy, which ultimately led to the revised policy.

To bridge the gap between peacebuilding and sustainable development, the policy's previous focus on post-conflict settings was revised to accommodate potential, active and post-conflict settings in which peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding processes can feed into state-building goals and objectives to consolidate peace and stability on the continent (AU 2024a). It was also expanded, "given the increasingly dynamic, non-linear nature of the contemporary peace and conflict landscape in the continent" (AU 2024a: viii).

The 2024 revised AU PCRDR policy framework lies at the centre of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)⁵ and the African Governance Architecture (AGA) (AU n.d.(a)). They create options for non-linear approaches to addressing conflict, peace and security, and governance challenges through either top-down or bottom-up approaches.

AU member states established the APSA in 2002 and the AGA in July 2010 to address reconciliation and the problems of instability, injustices and lack of social cohesion brought about by the many crises on the continent. The AGA provides a platform for dialogue and promotes democracy and good governance in Africa through shared norms and standards, institutions and other stakeholders, mechanisms and processes for interaction, and the African Governance Facility.

5 See "African Peace and Security Architecture: African Union's Blue Print for the Promotion of Peace, Stability and Security in Africa": <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/african-peace-and-security-architecture-apsa-final.pdf>

The APSA seeks to promote peace and security in Africa through its structures, organs and mechanisms, with an emphasis on early warning and conflict prevention, peacemaking, peace support operations, peacebuilding, PCRD initiatives and humanitarian interventions. A joint AGA–APSA Roadmap is currently being developed to facilitate concrete interventions towards good governance, peace, security and stability in Africa.⁶

These efforts, however, are a work in progress, reflected in the many peace, security and governance challenges still confronting Africa. The guns have not been silenced in Sudan, the DRC and other parts of the continent. Democratic governance consolidation is under threat, with many coups d'état having taken place in Guinea, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and, recently, Madagascar. Countries such as South Sudan, CAR, Burundi and Libya are currently undergoing a complex post-conflict transition period and require substantial funding for their recovery and reconstruction efforts to consolidate peace and achieve sustainable development. This reflects a major disconnect that requires united and collective action at national, regional, continental and international levels to address the problem (Akinola 2023).

Additional indicative elements, or pillars, were added to the 2006 PCRD policy's already existing ones. They sought to tackle political/transition, security, socio-economic, human rights and transitional justice, humanitarian, human and gender issues. They include youth inclusion, child protection and environmental sustainability. The AU PSC, in its communique of the 899th meeting of 5 December 2019, underlined the urgent need to address the impact of climate change on peace, security and development in Africa, with an emphasis on adaptation and resilience strategies.

The paradigm shift from a linear to a non-linear approach facilitates the adoption of hybrid approaches involving both state and non-state actors, as well as modern, traditional and indigenous processes to ensure the success of post-conflict recovery, reconstruction and development efforts (Addo 2020; Boege et al. 2009; Uesugi et al. 2021). This includes country-specific and home-grown approaches to addressing needs on the ground, based on national ownership and inclusive participation in the process for sustainable solutions.⁷

A major challenge, however, is resource mobilisation and support based on "African solutions to African problems" or "Africa helping Africa."⁸ To address this

6 See Concept Note on Consultation with PRC Sub-Committee on Human Rights, Democracy and Governance (HRDG) and the AGA/APSA Platform of AU PSC 1295th meeting PSC/PR/CN.1295 (2025) of 8 August 2025, para. 13. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/1295-Concept-Note-EN.pdf>

7 AU PSC Press Statement of the 528th meeting, PSC/PR/BR.(DXXVIII)-Rev.1 of 30 July 2015, p. 1.

8 AU PSC Press Statement of the 670th meeting, PSC/PR/BR.(DCLXX) of 22 March 2017, pp. 2–3.

gap, the ASI was established as a way to reinforce African leadership, national ownership and solidarity of AU member states, and thereby to find “African solutions to African problems” with the support of external partners. In its 670th session in March 2017, the PSC identified PCRDR as the “weakest link” in the implementation of the APSA and AGA frameworks for sustainable peace and development.⁹

African Solidarity Initiative

In his speech on Ghana’s Independence Day, 6 March 1957, Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah declared that “after all the black man is capable of taking care of his own affairs” (AfricaSon 2014). This statement was made in the context of the birth of a new Africa, freed from the shackles of colonialism and ready to take charge of the future. The notions of “Africa helping Africa” and working together for the “Africa We Want” are situated within this pan-African vision. It entails pooling resources and developing an integrated, peaceful continent driven by its people and being in its rightful place as a well-deserved global player (AU 2015).

The ASI was designed to respond to the needs of African countries emerging from conflict and embarking on post-conflict reconstruction, recovery and development. The AU Assembly Decision on ASI for support to PCRDR in Africa welcomed efforts to mobilise support within the continent for the implementation of ASI.¹⁰ This was followed by its launch on 13 July 2012 by ministers of foreign affairs/external relations to give impetus to post-conflict peacebuilding efforts, with a paradigm shift from heavy dependence on external funding and resources to one of “Africa helping Africa”.

The ASI was to follow a specific trajectory: launch the initiative, organise the African Solidarity Conference (ASC), and mobilise both in-kind and funding support for PCRDR programmes and activities in post-conflict countries in Africa (AU n.d.(b)). However, it essentially remained in its rudimentary stages or as an abandoned project as not much funding or support was realised from the ASI to support PCRDR programmes and activities on the continent (ACCORD 2020).

For instance, the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) was established in May 2013 at the 21st Ordinary Session of the AU and operationalised in January 2014.¹¹ It was created as a temporary multinational

9 Ibid., p. 2.

10 See Assembly/AU/Dec.425(XIX) and Doc.EX.CL/738(XXI).

11 AU/Dec.489(XXI) of 27 May 2013 on the Establishment of an African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises. https://archives.au.int/bitstream/handle/123456789/149/Assembly%20AU%20Dec%20489%20%28XXI%29%20_E.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

standby force for rapid and effective deployment in response to crises in Africa.¹² ACIRC was meant to reduce reliance of external support for peace operations, and to serve as a foundational force for the African Standby Force (ASF), which is still not operational. Although a credible initiative, it could not be sustained due to a lack of political will, funding gaps, troop contribution challenges and logistical difficulties (Brosig and Sempijja 2015; Esmenjaud 2014).

ACIRC highlights the issue of ideas not translating into action, which results in the failure of programmes and projects. This disconnect is the nemesis of AU PCRDR efforts on the continent (Lobakeng 2017), and undermines the nexus between peace, security and development.

With major cuts in ODAs across the globe, Africa has no option but to look within and manage its own affairs if it seeks to be a major player globally. The 1975 Inter-African Convention Establishing an African Technical Cooperation Programme made provision for funding programmes and projects, capacity building and institutional strengthening, technical assistance, in-kind support, as well as leveraging regional training centres for the acquisition of knowledge and skills to strengthen capacities in different peacebuilding programmes. Stakeholders targeted in funding PCRDR programmes in this initiative include relevant organisations/institutions, parastatals, private sector, academia, civil society, faith-based organisations, African experts and the African diaspora. The African Development Bank (ADB), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the EU remain traditional donor partners (AU n.d.(b), 2024a).

Hence, to facilitate peacebuilding and sustainable development efforts, notions of total dependence on donors must be reconfigured by shifting focus towards pooling internal resources for sustained indigenous solutions to problems.

AU PCRDR: Progress and Prospects

Since the adoption and operationalisation of the PCRDR policy framework, the AU Commission has undertaken several projects, including the formulation of regional strategies to address the root causes of conflicts, specifically in the Lake Chad Basin (AU 2018) and the Sahel,¹³ and the establishment of the AU PCRDR Centre in Cairo in 2021.

On the implementation of peace strengthening and QIPs in some post-conflict countries where needs assessment exercises were undertaken, activities

12 See "African Standby Force & African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises: Revised Roadmap III, June 2014–December 2015" <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/road-map-may-19.pdf>

13 See the African Union Strategy for the Sahel Region in AU PSC document PSC/PR/3(CDXLIX) of the 449th meeting of 11 August 2014.

included the construction and rehabilitation of schools and hospitals; support to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR) efforts; support for agricultural projects; donation of items and equipment like computers, vehicles and sanitation equipment; and establishment of development cooperatives.

These projects were implemented with funds from the AU Commission or partners in countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and CAR. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, for example, the five projects implemented included the rehabilitation, construction and furnishing of schools, clinics, libraries and boreholes, ranging from US\$50 000 to about US\$240 000 per project. In one project, development cooperatives were established with revolving funds amounting to US\$200 000 in different communities as part of small-scale businesses to boost local economies. Items were also donated for DDR and SSR, and capacity-building programmes undertaken.¹⁴

However, the funds were insufficient to comprehensively address prioritised needs in the post-conflict countries targeted for these activities. The Liberian mission did not benefit from any ASI funds as expected. This highlights the necessity of rejuvenating the ASI as a game-changer to address the gaps in PCRD efforts.

The structures for rolling out the AU PCRD policy are clearly defined and include:

- Oversight and strategic decision-making from the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, who adopted the policy;
- AU PSC;
- AU Ministerial Committee on PCRD in Africa proposed by the PSC for strategic direction;
- AU Commission Chairperson, who presides over the various commissioners and the relevant departments to engage in PCRD activities;
- AU Department for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (DPAPS), which comes under the leadership of the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, and where PCRD is situated.¹⁵

The operationalisation of a PSC Sub-Committee on PCRD was recommended by the AU PSC in some of its communiqués, including the communiqué of the

14 The author supervised the implementation of these projects while in the AU Liaison Office in Liberia between 2008 and 2018, in close collaboration with Liberian authorities and the involvement of civil society as implementing partners and beneficiaries.

15 AU PSC Press Statement PSC/PR/BR.(DCLXX) of its 670th meeting of 22 March 2017, p. 3; AU Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, Art. 3(c). https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37293-treaty-0024_-_protocol_relating_to_the_establishment_of_the_peace_and_security_council_of_the_african_union_e.pdf

1188th meeting held on 29 November 2023, to provide guidance in the implementation of PCRD programmes. The PSC subsequently adopted the terms of reference for the sub-committee in August 2025, and called for its immediate operationalisation.¹⁶

In 2024, the PSC requested the revitalisation of the defunct AU Inter-Departmental Task Force on PCRD (AU IDTF-PCRD) to ensure optimal implementation of the revised PCRD policy.¹⁷ The IDTF is expected to work closely with the PSC Sub-Committee in its activities.

The AU PCRD Centre in Cairo, launched on 21 December 2021, is a specialised technical agency mandated to provide support for the implementation of the PCRD policy in Africa. It is expected to implement, monitor and evaluate PCRD programmes and projects in African countries with the potential for, active or emerging from conflict. The Centre works closely with the AU Commission in mobilising resources, while coordinating joint efforts to ensure the effective implementation of PCRD in Africa. It is currently functional, but will need all the required resources to effectively and efficiently deliver on its mandate.

Policy and Practice: Fixing the Disconnect through ASI

The 2023 New Agenda for Peace, the AU's Agenda 2063 and the 2030 United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the frameworks for reinforcing AU PCRD interventions. The New Agenda for Peace, prepared by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in a policy brief, envisions a revitalised multilateralism and stronger international cooperation in responding to current and emerging threats to global peace and security.¹⁸ It emphasises rebuilding trust, solidarity and accountability, and mobilising the resources needed to respond to these threats.

Given the numerous structures, institutions, policies and joint coordination mechanisms, what is needed now is to ensure that post-conflict reconstruction and sustainable peacebuilding and development efforts translate into “silencing the guns,” and that countries emerging from war do not go back to war. Fixing this disconnect will require committed and sustained efforts to achieve the desired goals and objectives.

The AU PCRD policy framework and the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) must be construed in this light, and the ASI revived through awareness creation and sensitisation efforts among stakeholders. The AU PSC and UN Peacebuilding

16 AU PSC/PR/COMM.1297.3(2025) of 15 August 2025, para. 4.

17 AU PSC/PR/COMM.1198(2024) of 31 January 2025, para. 7.

18 For more details on the New Agenda for Peace, see <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/08/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-peace-en.pdf>.

Commission (PBC) recognise the vital role of ASI, and the AU PCRDCentre must take up this responsibility to ensure that ASI becomes a success. This will require working with the PCRDC Sub-Committee and the AU-IDTF on PCRDC with support from DPAPS. Reviving ASI as per PSC recommendations will mobilise resources within AU member states to roll out PCRDC programmes and projects. ASI must thus be on the agenda of AU member states through PSC meetings, as well as workshops and conferences.

These efforts must be undertaken within the currently ongoing AU High-Level Review of Governance, Peace and Security policy frameworks, of which ASI remains a cross-cutting issue. The review stems from a decision in the 38th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in February 2025 to scrutinise key continental frameworks on peace, security and governance, and recalibrate them to align with Agenda 2063.¹⁹ Some policies remain relevant and must be reinforced, while others have become obsolete and must be dropped.

The High-Level Panel met in the first week of August 2025 to deliberate on preparatory work undertaken by groups of experts mapping 27 policy and operational frameworks in thematic areas, including early warning, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. Preliminary findings included the emerging withdrawal of global resources, and a recommendation for the introduction of an AU levy of 5% of national defence budgets, 1% on all incoming air tickets into AU airspace, and 1% of outgoing financial transactions from AU economic zones (Murithi 2025).

The AU PSC's concern about AU member states not delivering on their pledges made in Addis Ababa at the February 2014 Pledging Conference must serve as a basis for revisiting the issue and renewing calls for more political will and commitment towards this cause.²⁰

The AU PSC also made recommendations for part of the AU Peace Fund to be committed to funding PCRDC programmes and projects. This will go a long way towards ensuring that concrete interventions are made in the field to facilitate implementation of the pillars of the revised AU PCRDC policy.²¹ In 2024, the Fund donated US\$7 million from the Crises Reserve Facility to conflict-affected regions on the continent, including South Sudan, Sudan, DRC, Libya, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, and for the stabilisation of the Lake Chad Basin and Sahel region (AU 2024b).

19 Assembly/AU/Dec.903-941(XXXVIII) of 15–16 February 2025. https://archives.au.int/bitstream/handle/123456789/10786/Assembly%20AU%20Dec%20%20903%20-%20941%20%28XXXVIII%29%20_E.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=

20 AU PSC PSC/PR/COMM.(DXCIII) of 593rd meeting of 26 April 2016.

21 AU PSC PSC/PR/COMM.(CMLVIII) of 958th meeting on 23 October 2020, para. 8.

Conclusion

The many challenges besetting the continent, including conflicts, terrorism, violent extremism and devastating climate change impacts, require urgent and committed action from AU member states, backed by the private sector, civil society and international partners to address them effectively. However, total dependence on partners will not provide the desired solutions. It is based on this consideration that the 1975 Inter-African Convention was initiated to pool resources within the continent to address challenges collectively in the spirit of African solidarity.

Peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction and development activities are essential for addressing potential, active and post-conflict challenges in ensuring that state-building goals are strengthened towards sustainable peace and development (Chandler 2010a; Ghani and Lockhart 2008). Linear approaches and responses to peacebuilding in Africa have not necessarily been useful in addressing recovery, reconstruction or transition needs (Chandler 2010b). The rolling back of the state and limited state interventions have, in some cases, weakened states, and undermined peacebuilding and state-building efforts (Fukuyama 2004).

Decades of research have underscored the need to adopt non-linear or non-sequential approaches in hybrid settings, comprising both formal and informal structures, processes and mechanisms (Boege et al. 2009). This will facilitate addressing root causes of conflict, preventing a relapse into violence, and consolidating peace on the continent.

The disconnect lies in the total dependence on external partners to address these challenges. This has not helped the African cause for promoting peace, security, stability and development. The AU's (2024a) revised PCRD policy provides the opportunity and framework for "African solutions to African problems" and "Africa helping Africa". The policy framework captures the right approach and context-specific responses to identified root causes of conflict in Africa. Its effective implementation for desired impact remains the major task ahead, and this can only be done through a rejuvenated ASI.

ASI provides the opportunity for AU member states to get things right. The AUDA-NEPAD, the ADB, the African private sector, civil society and the diaspora can coordinate their programmes with member states to make a difference, and the AU Commission's lead in this regard is essential to realise this objective. International partners, including the UN, EU and other donor countries, could come in to support this effort, but the time to ensure the success of the implementation of the revised PCRD policy is now. This can only happen by leveraging the ASI for sustainable peace and development.

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Strategic Hybridisation and the Right to Development: IGAD's Pragmatic Pan-Africanism in South Sudan

Ibrahim Magara¹

ABSTRACT

Through the case of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) mediation in South Sudan, this article examines how strategic hybridisation can operationalise the right to development under the African Union's Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development policy. While acknowledging IGAD's institutional weakness, this study draws on empirical data from 47 interviews, archival research and systematic document reviews to demonstrate how IGAD's approaches blended liberal, illiberal and pragmatic pan-African logics of peacebuilding that mediated between international pressures, geopolitical dynamics and local realities. It further demonstrates how IGAD's platform-based diplomacy created regionally legitimate frameworks that sustained a complex mediation process which led to the signing of the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). While the R-ARCSS is heavily elite-centric, it also comprises participatory dimensions to IGAD's mediation, revealing how Regional Economic Communities can be platforms for Africa's emancipatory peacebuilding.

KEYWORDS

IGAD, South Sudan, strategic hybridisation, pragmatic pan-Africanism, right to development, regional peacebuilding

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Introduction

The world is undergoing systemic shifts (Acharya 2017), necessitating a re-evaluation of Africa's peace and security governance. The African Union's (AU) Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy, which is crafted around six interrelated pillars – security; humanitarian assistance; political governance and transition; socio-economic development; human rights, justice and reconciliation; and women and youth empowerment (AU 2024) – provides ideational, normative and structural frameworks to reassess Africa's peace and security agenda. Peace and security governance intersects with development, a reality that is more visible in the African context where persistent cycles of violence, in countries like South Sudan, coincide with underdevelopment and contested legitimacy.

Implementation of the PCRD policy framework must transcend bureaucracy and technocracy. It should engender a deeper ideational and normative examination of how Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs), such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), can best interpret and domesticate peacebuilding within complex contexts characterised by violent conflicts, competition and geopolitical rivalries and global shifts.

This study analyses the IGAD-led peace process for South Sudan (2013–2018) through a dual conceptual lens of strategic hybridisation and platformisation, as developed by Magara (2025). It demonstrates how IGAD's mediation, codified in the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), comprised a realist blend of liberal, illiberal and pragmatic pan-African perspectives of peace. Building on Magara's (2025) work, this study illuminates how IGAD moved past the liberal peace orthodoxy, which itself has come under intense critique (Mac Ginty 2011; Paris 2004; Richmond 2009; Wallis and Richmond 2017), to advance a pragmatically hybridised form of peace that combined elements of stabilisation, social justice and human security. In so doing, the study reveals how IGAD's institutional leanness and flexibility enabled it to engage in an adaptive approach rooted in context, engendering lessons for a pragmatic pan-African response to Africa's peace and security needs.

IGAD has been critiqued for its institutional weakness (Apuuli 2015; Bereketeab 2019; Vertin 2018) and the R-ARCSS is largely depicted as an elite pact (Craze and Ferenc 2022; Mamdani 2018). President Salva Kiir's dangerous and unilateral political manoeuvring and the arrest and prosecution of former first vice president, Riek Machar, have once again exposed fundamental fractures in South Sudan's elitist and deeply fragile transitional government (Okello and Magara 2025; Pospisil 2025: 205). At the same time, South Sudan continues to perform poorly in all human development indices (Abubakar and Yahaya 2021: 135).

There is consensus that South Sudan's IGAD-brokered transitional government is fragile and the peace framework of the R-ARCSS remains unstable. Yet, the peace deal marked the formal end of the civil war, restored a fragile stability and provided the framework for the political transition and a protected space for peace interlocution in South Sudan. The R-ARCSS is therefore the basis for coordinating South Sudan's peace, security and development.

Drawing on scholarship that highlights communitarian values such as ubuntu in Africa's integration (Magu 2023), this study employs the case of IGAD's peace efforts in South Sudan to establish a nexus between the peace and security role of African RECs and the pan-African solidarity norm under the maxim of "African solutions to African problems" (Murithi 2013). As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argues, the quest for Africa's transformation also requires epistemic emancipation. Not only do these perspectives place African agency at the forefront, but they also illuminate the dense interconnections between global governance and regionalism in Africa, with the continent's RECs, like IGAD, moving to the centre of Africa's peace and security system.

IGAD's mediation in South Sudan reiterates the nexus between peacebuilding and the right to development (RtD) contemplated by both the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Right to Development (UN 1986) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) (AU 1981). Besides acknowledging development as a human right, these instruments provide legal frameworks for the pursuit of integral human development, which is also framed in the language of human security. Both the Declaration and the ACHPR provide political and legal infrastructures for conceptualising peacebuilding as legal and political processes through which the people of Africa can constructively pursue political, economic and social transformation. The PCRDC therefore provides a policy framework for the pursuit of RtD. The PCRDC's pillar 4 on socio-economic reconstruction expressly links the RtD to peacebuilding in contexts of conflict and fragility, such as South Sudan. This establishes a nexus between IGAD's peacebuilding in South Sudan and the RtD, which is the focus of this study.

Empirical data for this study draws on original fieldwork across IGAD member states between October 2019 and November 2021, comprising 47 semi-structured interviews conducted both in person and virtually. Interview data is supplemented by systemic document analysis and archival research at the AU Commission (AUC) and the IGAD South Sudan Office (IGAD-SSO), both in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Interviewees included purposively selected informants working for IGAD and its organs, like the Secretariat, its offices in member states, AU officials, organs established under the R-ARCSS such as the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC), relevant bureaucrats and diplomats, representatives of civil society (broadly understood), analysts, journalists and scholars. The study thematically coded the data and subjected it

to interpretive discourse analysis which is critical of international relations theory and transparently reflective of the author's pan-African positionality. The researcher obtained ethical clearance for the study from Loughborough University's relevant ethics sub-committee and, as per the ethical requirements, anonymity of the respondents has been maintained.

In terms of structure, the remainder of the article unfolds across four main sections. The next section critiques the liberal peace orthodoxy and introduces IGAD's strategic hybridisation and platformisation as flexible, context-sensitive frameworks for African peacebuilding. The section thereafter expands on the idea of emancipatory peacebuilding, drawing on IGAD's experience in mediating the South Sudan conflict. The following section examines the dynamics of hybrid governance, focusing on the interaction between liberal and illiberal modes of state-building. Finally, the last section distils key lessons for the AU's PCRD framework, underscoring the importance of pragmatic, locally grounded and pan-African approaches to peace and reconstruction.

Rethinking Peacebuilding: From Liberal Peace to Strategic Hybridisation

Inspired by Emmanuel Kant's democratic peace theory that liberal democracies are less inclined to engage in conflict with each other, post-Cold War peacebuilding was dominated by the liberal peace model engaged in diffusing norms of liberal democracy to build peace in contexts of civil wars, many of them in Africa (Zambakari 2016: 20). Liberal peacebuilding saw institutionalisation of governance, entrenching the rule of law and market liberalisation as important and context-free archetypes of durable stability (Wallis and Richmond 2017).

Liberal peacebuilding orthodoxy, however, found itself at odds with complex contextual dynamics of conflict contexts, leading to numerous cases of failure. Liberal peacebuilding was insensitive to Africa's post-colonial state fragmentations characterised by contested authorities and legitimacy. African polities exhibit hybrid networks of power that combine formal and informal authorities in ways that elide liberal peacebuilding's neat sequencing (Paris and Sisk 2009).

Following numerous cases of liberal state-building failures, scholars have since raised fundamental questions around the viability of liberal peacebuilding (Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond 2009; Wallis and Richmond 2017). As a result, policymakers are increasingly abandoning the liberal peace orthodoxy and embracing more pragmatic approaches that focus on "good enough outcomes" in the complex post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding endeavours (Wallis and Richmond 2017: 5).

The liberal peace critique not only questions decontextualised responses to peacebuilding but also its technocratic imperative. It shows that peacebuilding is a messy endeavour that must pay attention to complex histories and contextual dynamics of the affected societies. In this regard, conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction should be conceived as profoundly political processes that are deeply rooted in the societal, historical and geopolitical complexities of the affected societies. The intersections between state-building and regional integration in Africa produce overlapping sovereignties that make conflicts and peace processes simultaneously localised and regionalised (Magu 2023). The case of South Sudan reveals this reality not only because conflicts are shaped by enduring colonial legacies (Johnson 2016) but also due to the unique overlaps between state formation and state-building (de Simone 2022: 12), which are intricately interwoven with the complex regional politics (de Waal 2015) in which IGAD has been a constant player.

Against this backdrop, this study uses the case of IGAD in South Sudan – where, in the reading of Magara (2025), it operationalised adaptive regionalism through platformisation and strategic hybridisation – to illuminate how African RECs can develop alternative peacebuilding models grounded on pragmatism, institutional flexibility and pan-African solidarity.

IGAD's Platformisation in the South Sudan Crisis

South Sudan's civil war was an outcome of many years of governance failure characterised by overlapping security, economic, social and political crises traceable to Sudan's pre-independence upheavals (Johnson 2016). Post-independence Sudan experienced two major civil wars. IGAD's formation in 1986 coincided with Sudan's second civil war, which occurred between 1983 and 2005. From 1993, IGAD established a standing committee on Sudan, marking the commencement of its protracted peace efforts there (Apuuli 2015).

IGAD's mediation efforts culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed in 2005. Among other things, it laid out the roadmap to South Sudan's eventual independence in 2011. However, independence did not address the simmering crisis and in 2013 the world's youngest nation tumbled into a bloody civil war that claimed the lives of more than half a million people, displaced 2.5 million others and triggered one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent times (de Simone 2022: 1; OCHA 2018).

Maalim (2013: 3) notes that "IGAD has become proficient at being able to convene at very short notice". This was evident in South Sudan, where IGAD stepped in to initiate mediation as soon as the civil war broke out. Leveraging its history and experience in mediating in the previous conflict (Apuuli 2015), IGAD managed to bring the warring factions to the negotiating table. By 2015, it had

brokered a peace deal popularly known as the R-ARCSS. However, despite the R-ARCSS, renewed fighting ensued in 2016. This led to widespread violence across South Sudan, including in regions like Equatoria that were not affected by the first wave of the war. IGAD recalibrated and launched the so-called High-Level Revitalisation Forum (HLRF), which facilitated multifaceted peace talks that led to the signing of the R-ARCSS in 2018.

There had been strong critique of IGAD's mediation (the process) and the R-ARCSS (the outcome). Intervening in the debate on IGAD's contested role in South Sudan, Magara (2025) uses platformisation to illuminate IGAD's functionality beyond institutional narratives that portray IGAD as "a club of heads of state" (Bereketeab 2019: 148). At the core of the institutional critique of IGAD is that its effectiveness is heavily reliant on the political will of its frontline states, making it vulnerable during periods of leadership uncertainty. Two relevant examples are notable during IGAD's mediation in South Sudan.

The first is Ethiopia's internal turmoil that culminated in regime change while Ethiopia was hosting and leading mediation in South Sudan. The second is Sudan's 2019 transition which led to the ouster of Omar al-Bashir, who was the guarantor of the R-ARCSS. Nevertheless, tensions between principle and pragmatism and between justice and stability are intrinsic to peacebuilding in complex post-colonial contexts where countries and leaders engaged in peacebuilding are themselves trapped in personal and national precariousness that they must navigate.

There was intense competition within the region, particularly among and between IGAD's frontline members of Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda (Vertin 2018). Also, there were multiple external partners under the umbrella of IGAD-Plus, which included the AU and the European Union (EU), as well as the troika of the USA, UK and Norway. As expected, these multiple actors disagreed on their understanding of the issues and approaches to addressing the conflict in South Sudan. As one Kenyan diplomat explained, "With all these partners, you need a neutral space. IGAD has been our space for these kinds of diplomatic coordination" (Interview, 6 March 2020). An R-JMEC representative echoed this sentiment, describing IGAD as "a bridge between the AU and the international community...neither fully autonomous nor fully dependent" (Interview, 28 October 2020). Together, these dynamics illustrate a negotiated interdependence that delicately balances internal legitimacy, regional diplomacy and external engagement.

Platformisation enabled IGAD to function within the Horn of Africa's complex political marketplace (de Waal 2015). IGAD's institutional leanness allowed it to reinvent process and procedure while leveraging its character as an adaptive diplomatic platform. It created the space where heterogeneous actors converged,

deliberated and competed within the Horn's volatile political marketplace where formalities, bureaucracies and technocracies risked paralysis. As the mediation advanced, some conflictual consensus among the players involved started to emerge. For instance, according to a regional analyst based in Nairobi, the mediation established a shared primary concern of preventing state collapse and regional contagion (Interview, 26 January 2021). This explains why even rival states such as Sudan and Uganda managed to forge a conflictual consensus based on which Bashir and Museveni played a decisive role in pushing South Sudan's belligerents into signing the R-ARCSS (Mamdani 2018).

Beyond signing the peace agreement, IGAD instituted modest structures such as the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) and the R-JMEC, displaying its legacy of strategic minimalism while retaining political relevance in a volatile context where bureaucracy can provoke resistance.

Strategic Hybridisation

Magara's (2025) concept of strategic hybridisation provides an explanatory framework for a purposeful blend of contending perspectives of peace to remedy the failings of liberal peace. A critical analysis of IGAD's approaches reveals elements of liberal norms (rule of law, elections), illiberal practices (elite pacts, militarisation), pan-African values (ubuntu, solidarity) and realist pragmatism (ad hoc diplomacy, consensus-building). This combination is amenable to Africa's plural political economies, fragmented authorities and contested legitimacies.

Strategic hybridisation engenders a multiplicity of ideas, norms and practices of peace that question the rigidities of mainstream international relations and open the international system to multiple explanatory pathways based on contending sociologies (Huysmans and Nogueira 2012). From this perspective, strategic hybridisation remedies the technocratic posture of liberal peacebuilding, which tends not only to decontextualise but also to depoliticise peacebuilding. Instead, it anchors a deeply sociological imperative in discourses and praxis of peacebuilding. This enables peacebuilding to focus on liberal ideals, while paying attention to historical and contextual drivers of conflict, which include, among others, structural and identity-based grievances.

Liberal peacebuilding tends to blame violent conflicts on institutional deficits. In South Sudan, then part of Sudan, this was evident during the 2005 CPA. Due to the orthodoxy of liberal peacebuilding at the time, international actors, led by the US and supported by key European and UN partners, pushed for rapid state formation without addressing ethnopolitical fault lines, historical marginalisation and struggles over resource distribution and identity (Rolandsen 2011), so leading to the birth of a fragile and unviable Republic of South Sudan in 2011.

South Sudan unravelled quickly. In response, IGAD instituted a mediation process starting in 2013. This led to the 2015 ARCSS, which collapsed a year later. Through the HLRF, IGAD recalibrated and engaged in a protracted multifaceted mediation that ultimately led to the signing of the R-ARCSS in September 2018. IGAD's mediation was internationalised and contested, yet more attuned to local realities and contextual dynamics. The mediation was broad-based, experimental and adaptive in its orientation.

As one IGAD official observed, "you cannot follow a template; you adjust to each context" (Interview, 28 October 2020). Similarly, a Kenyan-based mediation expert used the allegory of "juggling raw liver" to describe IGAD's mediation in South Sudan (Interview, 3 July 2021). This is a vivid metaphor for the adaptive improvisation needed in such situations, where formal state-building efforts coexist with informal bargains and illiberal authorities, exemplifying Magara's (2025) strategic hybridisation in regional processes.

Such strategic hybridisation has a clear yet underexplored nexus with the pan-African perspectives beneath the maxim of "African solutions to African problems": Africa's dependence on external actors, including smaller states such as Qatar, undermines the ideological and aspirational significance of this maxim. Nevertheless, "African solutions to African problems" is an imperative of African agency to be understood as a struggle for ideological, normative, epistemic and practical autonomy within the limits of global interdependence (Murithi 2013). African RECs like IGAD must play a central role in Africa's pursuit of this goal. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervention in The Gambia (Hartmann 2017), the role of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Mozambique (Etyang et al. 2024) and IGAD in South Sudan are some examples demonstrating the ambition and limitations of African-led solutions. Recognising this dynamic, a Nigerian diplomat based at the AU remarked: "We cannot match regional mechanisms like the EU, but we are learning to solve our problems in our own way, slowly but surely" (Interview, 5 March 2020).

Inspired by Chantal Mouffe's (2013: 18) "conflictual consensus" and the notion of "agonistic peace" (Strömbom 2020), Magara (2025: 29) contends that IGAD's approach to peace was a strategic hybrid comprising competing visions of peace and negotiated compromises that balanced diverse interests and contending legitimacies. As one South Sudanese interlocutor observed, IGAD's mediation "mixed formal diplomacy with community intelligence...listening to chiefs, churches and women's groups...it is not tidy and not perfect, but it works" (Interview, 23 April 2020). A religious leader asserted that "at some point the religious leaders were granted the opportunity to lead the process, hence bringing on board elements of faith such as healing, forgiveness and reconciliation" (Interview, 9 November 2019). Similarly, the South Sudanese

civil society played a notable, albeit minimal and contested, role during IGAD's mediation in South Sudan.

IGAD's mediation, codified in the R-ARCSS, is an amalgam of multiple and contending yet complementary perspectives of peace. It features an elite pact, which aimed at achieving a sense of political and ethnic balance, a robust framework for institutionalising governance, and a platform for pursuing developmental transformation in the country. This experiment reveals how, amid persistent fragility, REC-led peacebuilding has the potential to secure broad-based dialogue, a level of stability, and innovative institutional designs. This speaks to African RECs' underutilised capacities to reshape peacebuilding on African terms. Thus, the R-ARCSS crystallises strategic hybridisation, which is a deliberate fusion of liberal norms, illiberal pragmatism, pan-African solidarity and realist diplomacy.

Complementary Perspectives of Peace

The case of IGAD in South Sudan is a testament that peace is an essentially contested concept (Srinivasan and Nouwen 2020) that can be understood, framed and approached in many ways. Other than visible elements of liberal peace, the R-ARCSS comprises overlapping elements of stabilisation, social justice and human security (Magara 2025).

IGAD's peace process and the outcomes comprise a negotiated coexistence of different visions of peace responding to contextual dynamics. These contending perspectives of peace shed light on the tensions between the rigidities of models like liberal peacebuilding and the pragmatism of hybrid frameworks. Importantly, as a flexible regional platform, IGAD mediated these tensions through continuous dialogue and pragmatic adjustments, privileging adaptability over doctrinal coherence. This demonstrates the potential of Africa's RECs to create and sustain a framework where disagreement is recognised and managed rather than suppressed, with peace emerging as a dynamic, iterative process of negotiation among competing ethical and political claims, with pragmatic hybrid outcomes.

Stabilisation

In general terms, stabilisation focuses on restoring order and preventing the recurrence of violence through security, governance and institutional consolidation. Archival records, including IGAD and AU communiqués, show that stabilisation arises from a broader continental concern with state survival as a prerequisite for peace. The regional military presence, including Uganda's controversial military intervention (Apuuli 2014), highlights IGAD's framing of regional peace in terms of stabilisation.

IGAD manifested its commitment to peace as stabilisation in multiple ways. First, it collaborated with the UN Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), which included IGAD member states as troop contributors. Second, while ultimately not implemented, IGAD adopted a resolution to establish a UN-mandated regional stabilisation force in South Sudan (Kindersley and Rolandsen 2021: 480). Third, IGAD's commitment to stabilisation in South Sudan was reflected in statements by leaders of its member states. For example, Uganda's military leader hailed the country's forces for stabilising the situation in South Sudan's town of Bor (Muhoozi 2021). Kenya's former President Uhuru Kenyatta affirmed his government's "commitment to stabilising South Sudan" (Shahidi News 2021). During an interview in Kampala, a Ugandan academic observed that these sentiments highlight IGAD leaders' conception of peace in terms of stabilisation (Interview, 13 February 2020). A Ugandan government official emphasised the need for a strong military presence in South Sudan to ensure state stability and civilian protection (Interview, 10 February 2020). Finally, the text of the R-ARCSS demonstrates a clear commitment to stabilisation through a pact between military elites; unification of forces; institutionalisation of ceasefire monitoring through the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM); disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR); and the creation of humanitarian corridors.

IGAD's commitment to the pursuit of peace framed in terms of stabilisation reabsorbed armed groups into South Sudan's transitional government, which some analysts argue institutionalised elite dominance and impunity (Craze and Ferenc 2022; Pospisil 2025). Yet, from an IGAD perspective, this elite bargain was a pragmatic response to a complex situation. An Addis Ababa-based Sierra Leonean diplomat explained: "We need realistic solutions in a fragile environment...stability comes first" (Interview, 4 March 2020). Such pragmatism reflected IGAD's structural limits. Without its own enforcement capacity, IGAD relied on negotiation, coordination and moral persuasion, yet it explicitly demonstrated its willingness to pursue stabilisation through military interventions where possible.

Human Security

Human security focuses on protecting individuals from violence and harm. Unlike stabilisation, which focuses on preservation and stability of the state, human security makes the individual the reference point of security. The idea of human security is evidenced in IGAD's documents and pronouncements of its bureaucrats. During the South Sudan mediation, IGAD's strategic framework (IGAD 2016) and a declaration by its former executive secretary, Mahboub Maalim (2013), emphasised the focus on human vulnerabilities. This concern corresponds to the AU's PCRDC articulation of peace as freedom from fear and want (AU 2024).

In its articulation of the need to guarantee civilian protection, the R-ARCSS prohibits gender-based violence, child recruitment and attacks on humanitarian actors.

Chapter three of the peace agreement, for instance, mandates safe humanitarian access, voluntary return of the displaced and rehabilitation. Chapter six lays out a framework for economic governance reforms. Chapter seven outlines a robust transitional justice framework that comprises a mechanism for reparations. These link physical safety, justice and livelihoods to sustainable peace in South Sudan.

Nevertheless, the human security agenda has struggled to gain meaningful traction in South Sudan. As one R-JMEC official described it, this impasse reflects “the tyranny of survival politics” (Interview, 28 October 2020). Nonetheless, the human security perspective questions the moral legitimacy of peace processes that prioritise stability over citizen welfare, aligning with the AU’s rights-based recovery ethos. The fact that IGAD facilitated a process that recognised and included a strong human security framework in the R-ARCSS is revealing of how Africa’s RECs are strategic spaces for human security interlocutions.

Social Justice

Social justice focuses on transforming the structures that create inequality and injustice. The R-ARCSS embeds social justice through provisions that promote equity, accountability and inclusion in post-conflict reconstruction. Chapter seven mandates transitional justice mechanisms to address past injustices and provide redress to victims. Affirming the need for inclusive governance, the R-ARCSS is not entirely an elite pact. It includes power-sharing among rival groups and representation for women (35%) and youth in political and peace institutions. Chapter seven also speaks to issues of equitable revenue distribution and anti-corruption reforms, aimed at ensuring fair access to national wealth. Through these measures, the R-ARCSS deliberately embeds structural transformation and fairness in peacebuilding.

Inclusion of social justice provisions in the R-ARCSS came after concerted efforts by civil society actors. This is noteworthy as it introduces civil society as an important protagonist in regional peacebuilding. This once again reveals how RECs provide a protected space for civic engagement at that level, making it a space to rethink emancipatory peacebuilding in Africa.

An Agenda for Emancipatory Peacebuilding

The AU’s normative approach to peacebuilding affirms the right of individuals and societies to freely pursue their own economic, social and cultural destinies, hence mainstreaming the RtD. The RtD underscores the moral dimension of development by linking it to human dignity and people’s identities. From an emancipatory perspective, the RtD in Africa speaks to the continent’s long struggle to free itself and its people from colonialism, imperialism and all forms of oppression and systemic violence. Africa’s justice and freedom are framed in terms of self-determination and self-reliance.

African RECs are part of the architecture of the AU's framework of emancipatory peacebuilding. Regional integration in Africa is part of the continent's struggle for unity and freedom from external interference. In Magu's (2023) reading, integration is itself a pan-African enterprise, anchored in the moral imperative of collective self-determination and shared development. In this regard the Africa Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is a pan-African framework aimed at achieving Africa's collective peace and security through homegrown ideas and practices that are spearheaded by Africans for Africans.

When viewed through this prism, IGAD's engagement in South Sudan, although imperfect, speaks to Africa's emancipatory peacebuilding. It is a strategic hybrid framework that weaves communitarian ethics and developmental justice in the enterprise of regional peacebuilding. This approach functions beyond and outside the liberal peacebuilding orthodoxy and converges in emancipatory peacebuilding. In the case of South Sudan, it is codified in the R-ARCSS.

South Sudan's story is one of intricate overlaps between state-building, development and regional interdependence. South Sudan's state-building intersects with state formation (de Simone 2022: 12). The country also finds itself within what Alex de Waal (2015) describes as the Horn of Africa's "political marketplace"; a complex ecosystem of politics and violence that connects South Sudan's conflicts with regional networks of power and money.

The experience of South Sudan illustrates the deep nexus between deprivation and violence, where underdevelopment both fuels and sustains instability, and vice versa. This explains IGAD's approach to peacebuilding, which combines conflict resolution and developmental enterprise, situating regional peace efforts within South Sudan's broader struggle for structural transformation and emancipation.

Pan-Africanism and the Right to Regionalisation of Development

Africa's liberation struggles have always been waged on the platform of pan-Africanism. The internal logic is that Africa's unity is essential for the continent's struggle for freedom and justice. While Africa's independent leaders differed on whether unity should be achieved rapidly (Casablanca group) or incrementally (Monrovia group), the liberation fighters, founding leaders of African nations, and the continent's thought leaders agreed that unity was indispensable to the continent's emancipation.

Weary of the colonial past, pan-Africanism rejects external interference. It emphasises the need for African nations and peoples to independently chart their own path towards stability and prosperity, as encapsulated in the maxim

“African solutions to African problems” (Murithi 2013). This includes a struggle for intellectual freedom which will enable African knowledges to guide the continent’s transformation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018).

The pan-African dream has been elusive, yet the aspiration endures. The turn of the millennium saw a thriving idea of African renaissance which led to the birth of, among others, the AU and APSA and the revitalisation of the notion of African solutions (Murithi 2013). The AU’s PCRD policy framework (AU 2024) draws from the AU’s (2000) Constitutive Act, to reignite the continental quest for unity and development while providing policy instruments to pursue pan-African ideals in contemporary peacebuilding practices.

Against this backdrop, peacebuilding and development are political and moral projects of emancipation that cannot fit in Western-style liberal paradigms. Furthermore, for Africa and Africans – as articulated in the PCRD – development is not merely a human right but also a signifier of emancipation from various forms of violence and oppression. IGAD’s mediation in South Sudan reflected this logic. As one Kenyan diplomat remarked, “The aim really is to establish favourable conditions for the people of South Sudan to develop their country” (Interview, 6 March 2020). Her perspective frames development as a fundamental part of peace rather than a deferred reward, highlighting the intrinsic link between peacebuilding and the RtD. This is evident in the provisions of the R-ARCSS, which lays out programmes for ending violence and building peace together with reconstructing governance and fostering sustainable development. This framing of peacebuilding intersects with the PCRD’s articulation across multiple pillars, including humanitarian assistance, state-building, political governance, security sector reform, socio-economic reconstruction, environmental sustainability, and transitional justice.

Essentially, the R-ARCSS domesticates the vision and principles of the PCRD, translating continental aspirations into a national framework for South Sudan’s peacebuilding. The peace agreement also provides for regional oversight by embedding a structured role for both the AU and IGAD in guiding South Sudan’s transition from conflict to stability. As such, while the R-ARCSS pre-dates the PCRD’s latest revision, both frameworks reveal a deep complementarity. Hence, the PCRD can serve as a strategic foundation for reinvigorating the implementation of the R-ARCSS, particularly amid recent setbacks (Pospisil 2025).

Embedding these initiatives within pan-African traditions of solidarity, self-reliance and transformative justice reconceptualises RECs such as IGAD as architects of emancipatory peace rather than instruments of external enforcement.

Development and Cultural Reclamation

Africa's quest for emancipation extends to cultural reclamation. Indeed, the RtD not only focuses on the dignity of individuals but also recognises the identities of societies and their cultural practices. This is why pan-African consciousness involves a reclamation of African cultures and strengthens their interconnections to achieve unity in diversity.

Peacebuilding in Africa must address developmental and cultural needs. This is why Africa's model of peacebuilding is at odds with international financial institutions that pursue developmental policies that are insensitive to Africa's political and cultural dynamics. Poverty must not be reduced into mere state, governance and administrative failures, as the liberal peace model assumes. To the contrary, Africa's persistent underdevelopment is a legacy of historical dispossession and enduring dependency (Amin 1972). Africa's conflicts and civil wars cannot therefore be addressed through linear institutional fixes contemplated by liberal peace paradigms (Paris and Sisk 2009).

As in many parts of Africa, in South Sudan externally imposed aid and state-building templates often clash with community-based notions of justice, reconciliation and restitution (Maxwell et al. 2017). A Ugandan-based South Sudanese lawyer and human rights activist argued that, as a young nation, South Sudan is at a critical juncture. The country, in his view, will have to contend with whether to replicate externally imposed development models or to forge its own pathway informed by the lessons of Africa's experience with Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which devastated many of the continent's economies (Interview, 14 February 2020).

The decision of IGAD to include traditional authorities and faith leaders in its mediation process is not only a recognition of indigenous authorities but also a small step in the direction of the search for Afrocentric approaches to peacebuilding. IGAD's gesture is significant in that it recognises the centrality of local actors, ideas and practices in shaping South Sudan's peacebuilding and development.

Emancipatory peacebuilding, seen through the pan-Africanist idea of development as political and cultural reclamation, reasserts Africa's agency in defining its own modernity and leading its own development agenda. It also calls for the restoration of epistemic sovereignty in understanding Africa's historical realities and pursuing the continent's peace and developmental liberation in ways that restore the dignity, autonomy and creativity of African peoples and societies as they navigate the path toward stability and development.

State-Building and Hybrid Governance

The evolution from conflict termination to sustainable peace in South Sudan is neither linear nor technocratic. It is deeply political, path-dependent, and shaped by the legacies of violence, institutional fragility and contested legitimacy, which necessitates a transition from ceasefire management to state-building for sustainable peace and development.

This section examines how IGAD's peacebuilding interventions have navigated and at times reinforced hybrid governance configurations that blur the boundaries between liberal, illiberal and pan-African ideas and practices of peace.

Hybrid Governance as a Post-Conflict Reality

South Sudan is characterised by a formal state constructed on international frameworks, and a parallel network of informal institutions grounded in ethnic affiliations and customary law. In many rural areas where state authority remains weak, traditional leaders, elders and church figures continue to anchor everyday governance and legitimacy (Leonardi 2019). Even at the national level, entities like the Dinka's Jieng Council of Elders (JCE) wield significant influence (Ngrimwa 2021). Commenting on this, one South Sudanese activist based in Nairobi noted, "We live in two systems, one customary and one official; the R-ARCSS tries to balance both" (Interview, 29 July 2021).

Positioned within this dynamic, IGAD's mediation recognised this complexity and attempted to manage it through a negotiated equilibrium that balances power-sharing, decentralisation and transitional security arrangements. The R-ARCSS establishes a framework that attempts to stabilise South Sudan's fractured landscape by integrating rival authorities into a hybrid political order. This explains why IGAD's state-building enterprise in South Sudan is neither purely statist nor entirely liberal.

Rather than forcing convergence towards a single model, IGAD's mediation attempts to institutionalise plural systems of governance to interact pragmatically, creating a platform for adaptive stability. This approach exemplifies Magara's (2025) strategic hybridisation, which essentially extends hybrid peace theory (Mac Ginty 2011) to the regional level by demonstrating how IGAD's approach to peace in fragile contexts arises not from institutional purity but from negotiated coexistence among diverse norms, practices and authorities.

Liberal and Illiberal State-Building

The post-war experience in South Sudan illuminates the tension between liberal aspirations and illiberal realities. The R-ARCSS articulates familiar liberal milestones, such as elections, a permanent Constitution and transitional justice while it establishes a state that is highly centralised, militarised and dominated by ethnic power networks. IGAD's mediation, while instrumental in halting open warfare, has also reinforced a fragile elite bargain that privileges stability over transformation. As a South Sudanese lawyer noted, "The R-ARCSS gives us calm, but not reform" (Interview, 14 February 2020).

Yet, dismissing this outcome simply as failure (Bereketeab 2019; Craze and Ferenc 2022; Vertin 2018) overlooks the structural realities of African state-building, and the complex context that IGAD was attempting to navigate in South Sudan. As Paris and Sisk (2009) contend, liberal peace frameworks are too linear and neat and tend to ignore the political economies of survival that shape post-war governance. In many fragile contexts, illiberal tools, like patronage, co-optation and selective inclusion, work as transitional devices that preserve order while gradually creating space for a continuous dialogue and incremental reform.

While reform is the goal, a pragmatic response is not to eradicate illiberal practices rapidly or even entirely but to harness them toward inclusive and emancipatory ends. As revealed by the case of ECOWAS in Liberia and Sierra Leone and SADC in Mozambique, step-by-step reform grounded in local ownership tends to outlast externally imposed conditionalities (McNamee and Muyangwa 2021). African RECs are therefore well positioned to facilitate this gradualist transition by anchoring local power dynamics within regional norms of accountability, a process that can be approached through Magara's (2025) concept of strategic hybridisation.

Development as State Legitimacy and Social Repair

Decades of war in South Sudan have eroded public trust; rebuilding it requires visible, inclusive and decentralised development. Through its mediation, IGAD helped secure the basic political foundations for continued peacebuilding with R-ARCSS-based mechanisms such as the R-JMEC and the CTSAMVM, in cooperation with partners like UNMISS, creating a monitoring framework for stabilising conditions and sustaining a fragile transition. Yet as one grassroots organiser put it, "People will not believe in peace until they see roads, hospitals, schools and food" (Interview, 3 September 2020). This assertion captures the spirit of social repair and development as fundamental functions of peacebuilding.

The case of South Sudan is not isolated. In fragile post-conflict environments, legitimacy depends less on formal democratic procedures than on the state's

ability to deliver tangible peace dividends, security, services and livelihoods. The R-ARCSS already establishes a robust framework which aligns with the PCRDR's pillars of people-centred development, inclusive governance and accountability. Should it be supported, the programmes of South Sudan's hybrid system under the R-ARCSS can contribute to gradual evolution toward stability and developmental gains in South Sudan. Achieving this transformation, however, demands sustained investment in long-term planning, community participation and equitable resource distribution.

Implications for PCRDR and African Peacebuilding Policy

IGAD's mediation in South Sudan highlights political brokerage and regional diplomacy as much as bureaucratic design, underscoring that peacebuilding is fundamentally political before it is technical. The process drew on the political capital of leaders of IGAD's member states. This approach ensured that leaders like Ethiopia's Hailemariam Desalegn, Kenya's Uhuru Kenyatta, Uganda's Yoweri Museveni and Sudan's Omar al-Bashir used historical linkages, cross-border influence and shared security interests to sustain negotiations and coerce and persuade South Sudanese belligerents into agreeing to a peace deal (Mamdani 2018).

For the AU, this implies that RECs like IGAD should be empowered not merely as policy implementers but as core pillars of the APSA and indeed political actors exercising subsidiarity (Apuuli 2015). A decentralised, context-specific approach would allow RECs to act decisively while remaining anchored in continental norms and values in pursuit of Africa's peacebuilding agenda as envisaged in the PCRDR framework.

Adaptability proved indispensable in South Sudan's volatile political landscape, allowing IGAD to sustain mediation momentum and preserve its diplomatic influence amid shifting alliances. Procedural improvisation is not a sign of institutional fragility but a strategic asset in fluid post-conflict environments, where flexibility is necessary to sustain dialogue. This accentuates adaptability as both a principle and a method of peacebuilding. This is an important lesson for the PCRDR, which must consider the fact that continental templates, however comprehensive, risk losing relevance when applied mechanically across Africa's diverse political settings. Instead, strategic hybridisation, as illustrated by IGAD's experience, offers a pragmatic logic.

This study's case study affirms that "peace must bring bread" (Interview, 3 September 2020), capturing the nexus between peace and livelihoods. The R-ARCSS embodies this logic through provisions that link governance, security and economic reform as interdependent pillars of sustainable peace. This reaffirms the PCRDR understanding of the RtD not as an aspirational add-on but as

a strategic imperative for peacebuilding. In implementing PCRDR, African RECs must therefore embrace simultaneity, advancing governance, security and development. Relatedly, African peacebuilding requires a normatively plural outlook that recognises multiple, contextually grounded pathways to peace and development. Recognising this plurality means grounding peacebuilding in Africa's own epistemologies, moral logics and cultural traditions, which includes recognising and addressing structures of violence (Galtung 1969: 190) in pursuit of justice and dignity.

IGAD's experience demonstrates that African-led peacebuilding thrives when political realism, institutional innovation, developmental urgency and epistemic autonomy converge. The PCRDR should encourage deeper investment in African scholarship, policy innovation and indigenous legitimacy by strengthening initiatives such as the AU's Network of Think Tanks for Peace (NeTT4Peace) (AU 2023) to help ensure that continental policy is shaped by African research and analysis rather than external directives. Operationalising this principle within PCRDR programmes requires supporting national and regional research institutions, funding participatory peace diagnostics that engage traditional and community authorities and embedding cultural and linguistic diversity in peacebuilding design and praxis.

The AU's challenge is to institutionalise these attributes within the operational machinery of the PCRDR by empowering RECs politically through reliable funding and subsidiarity, and building institutional flexibility to support hybrid paradigms of peace. A decolonial vision envisages African peace practices that are diverse in form, rooted in context, and united by shared commitments to dignity, justice and collective self-determination.

Conclusion

Through the empirical case study of IGAD's mediation in South Sudan, this article employed Magara's (2025) concepts of strategic hybridisation and platformisation to describe the fluid, institutionally lean yet contextual and adaptive framework of regional peacebuilding in Africa. The study demonstrated how IGAD's approach to peacebuilding in South Sudan blended liberal, illiberal, pan-African and realist models of peace, leading to an amalgam of ideas, values and norms of peace codified in the R-ARCSS, which forms the basis for South Sudan's entwined processes of peacebuilding and development.

Critiquing the overemphasis on IGAD's institutional weaknesses, this article contends that IGAD's pragmatism in addressing the crisis in South Sudan should be read through the lens of embracing political contingency. However, embracing pragmatism is not necessarily an endorsement of disorder. It is, rather, a recognition that peace is an iterative and negotiated process which is contextual

and evolving. South Sudan's historical and circumstantial dynamics as well as regional geopolitics could easily drive bureaucracy and technocracy into paralysis. Hence, the level of indeterminacy adopted by IGAD is less a question of institutional weakness than of a deliberative regional diplomacy that privileges dialogue over domination and aligns liberal peace norms with contextually grounded practices inspired by integration and pan-African solidarity (Magu 2023) expressed through conflictual consensus building.

IGAD's mediation in South Sudan is testament that African RECs, even with limited resources, can cultivate diplomatic legitimacy and forge political consensus through pragmatic, relationship-based diplomacy. This study advances the agenda for emancipatory peacebuilding under the framework of pan-Africanism, arguing that peacebuilding in Africa should be understood as an evolving political, developmental and epistemic project, rooted in the continent's historical struggles for emancipation and its pursuit of the RtD. To sustain this momentum, APSA must pair institutional innovation with a clear and coherent ideological foundation driven by African RECs, with the aim to transform the maxim of "African solutions to African problems" into a practical framework for sustainable peace and development. This brings the RtD into the core of the AU's PCRD agenda, offering a feasible path toward pragmatic pan-Africanism in an increasingly fragmented world.

The article offers three key and interrelated recommendations: first, strengthen the political and financial independence of African RECs, including through operationalising the AU Peace Fund and regional cost-sharing mechanisms; second, institutionalise inclusive consultative forums involving civil society, youth, women and traditional and religious leaders to democratise peacebuilding and enhance social legitimacy; and third, invest in epistemic infrastructures, including regional research networks, policy schools and mediation training centres, to consolidate African intellectual leadership in peace and development.

The foregoing will contribute to ensuring that Africa's peacebuilding transforms into a robust framework of reclaiming and reaffirming African agency to reshape relevant institutions and reimagine development as an emancipatory pan-African agenda. As envisaged by APSA and the PCRD, African RECs must be at the core of Africa's transformative peacebuilding agenda.

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Interview with an IGAD/R-JMEC official held virtually on 28 October 2020.

Interview with a South Sudanese delegate to IGAD peace talks held virtually on 23 April 2020.

Interview with a Kenyan diplomat held in Addis Ababa on 6 March 2020.

Interview with a Sierra Leonean pracademic held in Addis Ababa on 4 March 2020.

Interview with a Nigerian diplomat at AU-PSC held in Addis Ababa on 5 March 2020.

Interview with a South Sudanese lawyer and social justice activist held in Kampala on 14 February 2020.

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Post-Conflict Socio-Economic Development and Social Cohesion in Cameroon: An analysis of the Presidential Plan for Reconstruction and Development (PPRD) in the Anglophone Regions

Smith Naseri Edumbong¹

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the Presidential Plan for Reconstruction and Development (PPRD) in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon by evaluating its role in post-conflict recovery through social cohesion. It situates the PPRD within the historical and political context of the conflict and analyses how the plan seeks to promote peace through humanitarian and socio-economic interventions. Using the concept of social cohesion as defined in both academic and policy frameworks, particularly those of the United Nations Development Programme and the African Union's Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development policy, the article evaluates the PPRD's contribution to peacebuilding. The analysis shows that, although the PPRD represents a positive step toward reconstruction, it focuses mainly on horizontal cohesion within communities and pays limited attention to vertical cohesion between the state and citizens. The study concludes that sustainable peace in Cameroon requires a more comprehensive, rights-based approach that links socio-economic development with justice, reconciliation and institutional reform to rebuild trust and legitimacy.

KEYWORDS

Cameroon, "Anglophone Problem," PPRD, vivre ensemble, PCRD

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Introduction: Political History of the “Anglophone Problem”

Since the beginning of the conflict in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon, the total number of people killed or displaced, as well as the number of returnees, is not clear. The available information is inaccurate due to the inadequacy of data collection in the regions. Nonetheless, estimates show that about 6 000 people have been killed and more than 500 000 internally displaced, in addition to more than 80 000 who have fled to Nigeria as refugees (Human Rights Watch 2023; ICG 2022). However, an increasing number of people have been returning to their communities since 2022 (UN OCHA 2022).

The anglophone crisis in Cameroon is a political and historical conflict whose roots can be traced back to the reunification between La Republique du Cameroun and the former British Southern Cameroons in 1961. French Cameroon gained its independence from France in 1960 with a functioning government. British Southern Cameroons, on the other hand, was still being administered by the British as part of the United Nations (UN) Trusteeship.

At the termination of the trusteeship, people were given two options: to gain independence as part of Nigeria or to join the independent Cameroon. In 1961, the territory voted in an UN-administered plebiscite to obtain independence through a union with the Republic of Cameroon (Ardener 1962; Awasom 2000; Chem-Langhëë 1995; Konings and Nyamnjuh 1997; Ngoh 1979). Prior to the plebiscite, negotiations between the representatives of the British Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon on the form and other elements of the new federal republic had been concluded, notwithstanding allegations of strong-arming, inexperience and disunity in the camp of the British Southern Cameroonians.

The absence of a third option – for the territory to gain its independence as a separate nation – created the first cracks in the newly reunified Cameroon (Amin 2021; Konings and Nyamnjuh 2003; Ngoh 1999). The political manoeuvres that occurred before, during and after the plebiscite, whose result saw the former British Southern Cameroons gain its independence by joining the Republic of Cameroon, are evidence of traces of a problem. Some of these included the amendment of the existing La Republique du Cameroun Constitution to contain the new federal system, as opposed to drafting a new Constitution. In addition, the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly did not adopt the federal Constitution in the same way it had been presented for debate, endorsement and adoption by the House of Assembly in La Republique du Cameroun. The new nation, the Federal Republic of Cameroon, was partitioned by Presidential Decree No. 61-DF-15 of 20 October 1961 into six administrative regions, with West Cameroon being one of them (Anyangwe 1979; Awasom 2020). This reduced the federated state of West Cameroon to an administrative unit, a situation that the West Cameroon government heavily protested (Ngoh 1999).

In the period between the reunification in 1961 and 1972, the country underwent broad constitutional and political changes under President Ahmadou Babatoura Ahidjo. A major change to the Constitution in 1972 saw the dissolution of the federal system and a return to a centralised unitary state (Issaev and Zakharov 2024; Stark 1976). The latter provided wide administrative powers to the president and his representatives. During this period, several pressure groups were formed as a result of what political figures and people of West Cameroon perceived as unfavourable and unsatisfactory treatment and changes (Elong 2013; Konings and Nyamnjoh 2019). This exacerbated the grievances that had already existed before the reunification, further widening the cracks in the system.

From 1972 to 2008, the country underwent several changes in the Constitution under both Ahidjo and President Paul Biya, which further eroded the federal system adopted during the reunification.² These changes in the form and structure of the state led to increased grievances in the former West Cameroon at their perceived or real marginalisation, culminating in the “Anglophone Problem”. Issues included the erosion of the federal state, the militarisation of the territory, the heavy clamp-down on dissenting voices, the disproportionate distribution of development finance between East and West Cameroon, the limited number of anglophones in the administration and the “francophonisation” of the public service (Amin and Takougang 2018; Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003). The system was perceived to lead to systemic discrimination against and sometimes disenfranchisement of the English-speaking³ population and communities of the country. This became a major point of contention and added to the root causes of the ongoing conflict.

The deep historical roots of the anglophone conflict demonstrate that grievances in the North West and South West regions go far beyond surface-level dissatisfaction. As the preceding analysis illustrates, these grievances are tied to questions of identity, political exclusion and institutional mistrust, all factors that have eroded the social contract between the state and the anglophone population.

This article contends that while the Presidential Plan for Reconstruction and Development (PPRD) represents a necessary step toward recovery, its socio-economic orientation limits its capacity to rebuild the fractured relationship between the state and the anglophone population. The argument advanced here is that sustainable peace and social cohesion require complementing the PPRD’s development focus with deliberate political, justice and reconciliation measures capable of restoring state legitimacy and citizen trust.

2 This study does not analyse the legality of these changes.

3 “Anglophone region” and “English-speaking region” are used interchangeably in this article.

The remainder of this article expands on the historical and political origins of the anglophone conflict, highlighting the erosion of trust and social cohesion that underpins current tensions. It then conceptualises social cohesion from both theoretical and policy-oriented perspectives, situating Cameroon's experience within broader African and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) frameworks. This is followed by an examination of the government's post-conflict interventions, particularly the Major National Dialogue and the PPRD, and assessment of their design and implementation. Thereafter, the PPRD is analysed through the lens of the African Union's (AU) Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy to evaluate its capacity to rebuild both horizontal and vertical social linkages. The article concludes by proposing a comprehensive, rights-based reconstruction approach that unites socio-economic development with reconciliation, justice and governance reform.

The Anglophone Conflict: Tracing the Breakdown in Social Cohesion

Several political groups, such as the Cameroons Indigenes Party (CIP), Kamerun United Party (KUP) and the Cameroons Commoners' Congress (CCC), which had been formed prior to the plebiscite and championed the idea of an independent British Southern Cameroons (the third option), turned militant due to shortcomings on the government's part to address calls and demands for restructuring the system, including a return to the federal system of government. The government responded by banning some of these groups, including the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) – an offshoot of the All Anglophone Conference (AAC) – and arbitrarily arresting and detaining key political figures, such as Fongum Gorji Dinka, students and others participating in public demonstrations against the changes made to the Constitution (Awasom 2020; Awoh and Nkwi 2015; Echitchi 2021).

The 1990s witnessed an era of political liberalisation, the introduction of the multiparty system in Cameroon and the enactment of a law on freedom of association (Fonchingong 2004; Konings 2001). Opposition political parties were formed, most notably the Social Democratic Front (SDF) (Krieger 2008). Despite the law on freedom of association, there was a heavy crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrations in this period, which eventually led to the formation of a coalition of opposition parties, the National Coordination Committee of Opposition Parties (NCCOP).

NCCOP and the SDF led calls for nationwide civil disobedience, boycotts and strike action between April 1991 and January 1992, in what was described as "Operation Ghost Town." It also called on the government to organise a national conference on the political and constitutional future of the country (Atanga 2011; Dicklitch 2002; Gros 1995). The government resisted these actions and continued

to clamp down on public demonstrations. To diffuse the tension, tripartite talks took place between the government, opposition leaders and the ruling party between 30 October and 18 November 1991. The resolutions arrived at were never implemented by the government.

The first competitive and multiparty elections were organised in October 1992 with the disapproval of opposition parties, which protested the hasty scheduling of an election prior to the adoption of an electoral code. The late adoption of the electoral code in September of the same year allowed for only a 30-day campaign period. President Paul Biya subsequently declared victory in what was considered one of the most contested elections in the history of the country, with international observers like the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) indicating that it was not free and fair (NDI 1992).

The anglophone leader of the main opposition party, John Fru Ndi, contested the official results and called for civic demonstrations (Fokwa 2020; Fonchingong 2004; Ngwane 2014; Takougang 1996). In response, the government declared a two-month state of emergency in North West Province (Fombad 2004; Kamga 2017). The area was seen as a stronghold of the opposition party and was also the region of origin of several key political figures in the former West Cameroon. The state of emergency resulted in gross human rights violations and sweeping security measures over this part of the country. After the election, an amended Constitution was promulgated in 1996, further strengthening the powers of the president and creating a decentralised unitary state.

The grievances that led to the 2016 public demonstrations by teachers and lawyers in the North West and South West regions – the perceived forced assimilation of anglophones, marginalisation, the “francophonisation” of the public service, education and the judiciary, limited representation of anglophones in key positions at the national level, appointment of French-speaking teachers and magistrates in schools and courts in English-speaking communities – had existed in this part of the country since 1961, and the responses of the government did not help the situation. The crackdown on public demonstrations, ban on political pressure groups and outright denial of an Anglophone Problem meant the continuous existence of conflict triggers.

Political pressure groups such as the SCNC went underground after their rallies and demonstrations were banned in the anglophone regions in 1995 (Konings and Nyamjoh 2003), sending them further into the fringes. This increased their radicalisation and calls for secession, including a case before the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.⁴ However, some SCNC militants and sympathisers organised annual demonstrations on 1 October to celebrate

4 *Kevin Gunme and Others v Cameroon* (2009) AHRLR 9 (ACHPR 2009)

what they considered to be independence day of the former British Southern Cameroons, which they referred to as Ambazonia. Even these small and sometimes insignificant demonstrations were met with arbitrary arrests and detention, including raids on the night before such events.

The government's heavy-handed response to the peaceful demonstrations and demands of 2016, including the arrest, detention and assault of lawyers, mirrored the usual responses to public discontent and demonstrations. This gave anglophone separatist and secessionist hardliners and extremists an opportunity to exploit the frustrations and grievances of a population that wanted to be heard and represented. The arrest and detention of the leaders of the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC) (Annan et al. 2021) and the violent clashes that followed led to concentrated calls for secession of the former West Cameroon from the Republic. Those purporting to represent the anglophone population formed a governing structure for a non-existent Ambazonia nation after the arrest of the leaders of the CACSC, and seemed to have some legitimacy and recognition among the people. Their eventual arrest, extradition from Nigeria and trial undoubtedly exacerbated the current conflict (Eko 2025).

What is clear from the handling of the Anglophone Problem and the current conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon is that there has been a lack of political will by respective governments to address the root causes of the problem, which many trace back to the dismantling of the federal system. Historically, when the debate on the Anglophone Problem has come up, usually forced into the public domain through demonstrations, the idea that the form of the state is non-negotiable has been a precursor for failure. This is applicable to the current conflict as well, as highlighted during the national dialogue in 2019.⁵

Other issues that have been raised by the anglophone population are their perceived marginalisation and treatment as second-class citizens. This disruption to social cohesion can be seen between the people and the state, at times between the two anglophone regions (Kah 2012; Konings and Nyamnjoh 2000), and, to a limited extent, between the anglophone and the francophone populations (Agwanda et al. 2020). To better understand the challenges and opportunities of post-conflict recovery in this context, it is important to explore the concept of social cohesion and its relevance in fractured societies like Cameroon.

5 Article 64 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon states that "No procedure for the amendment of the Constitution affecting the republican form, unity and territorial integrity of the State and the democratic principles which govern the Republic shall be accepted".

Social Cohesion and the Concept of *Vivre Ensemble* in Cameroon

The absence of social cohesion is evident in social tension, which leads to an increase in human rights violations, violent crimes, violation of minority rights and a breakdown in the social fabric of the society that leads to violent conflict. There is a breakdown of social cohesion when there is a disequilibrium between the expectations of the society and the capacity of the state to meet those expectations, which leads to conflict (OECD 2010).

The main role of social cohesion is to promote harmony, solidarity, social order and security in society (Larsen 2014: 3). A lack of social cohesion is evidenced in social and economic divisions within society – “these divisions represent vectors around which politically salient societal cleavages can develop” (Easterly et al. 2006: 105). Langer and colleagues (2015) developed their conceptual framework for social cohesion based on the vertices of inequality, trust and identity. The element of trust includes trust among, across and within groups, as well as with the state. The absence of trust in government institutions is a vector for conflict (Langer et al. 2015: 7–8).

Chan et al. (2006: 290) note that social cohesion is “a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterised by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations”. Social cohesion is thus viewed both vertically, between the state and society, and horizontally between citizens, organisations, groups and other actors.

Jenson (1998: 15) highlights five dimensions of social cohesion: “1) belonging; 2) participation; 3) inclusion; 4) legitimacy; and 5) recognition”. They provide guidance in analysing the situation of social cohesion in Cameroon, both as reasons for the conflict and as dimensions needed for adequate post-conflict rebuilding. To build sustainable peace in conflict-affected communities, there is a need to work towards improving these dimensions in an interrelated manner. Dragolov et al. (2016: 6) indicate three main domains of social cohesion: connectedness, social relations and a focus on the common.

In their experience and work across conflict-affected countries, development and policy-oriented institutions have developed different approaches to viewing and working towards building social cohesion. From a policy perspective, the UNDP’s approach provides a particularly relevant framework for this study, given its central role in implementing the PPRD. The UNDP (2009: 14) defines social cohesion as “tolerance of, and respect for, diversity...both institutionally and individually”; grounded in two complementary dimensions: the reduction of disparities, inequalities and social exclusion; and the strengthening of social

relations and interactions. These dimensions align with post-conflict reconstruction logic, where the rebuilding of horizontal linkages among communities must be accompanied by efforts to restore vertical trust between citizens and the state.

The first dimension highlights the need to reduce or ideally eliminate the social exclusion of groups and peoples, especially those who have historically suffered such exclusions. Social exclusion has an inextricable link with increased insecurity. The second dimension focuses on improving and sometimes re-establishing the bonds that bind people together by developing social capacity in all its forms. The evolving academic and policy definitions of social cohesion, particularly their emphasis on trust, inclusion and shared identity, provide a useful analytical lens for assessing post-conflict interventions.

In this article, these dimensions serve as evaluative criteria for examining the design and implementation of Cameroon's PPRD. By analysing how the PPRD engages with both horizontal cohesion among communities and vertical cohesion between citizens and the state, the article situates Cameroon's reconstruction efforts within the broader discourse on peacebuilding and post-conflict governance.

As seen in the case of Cameroon, minorities can become insecure when they feel that they are victimised or marginalised by the government. However, it is important to note that differences between groups "are not enough in themselves to cause conflict, but social exclusion and horizontal inequalities provide fertile ground for violent mobilization" (Ibid.). In rebuilding social cohesion, it is therefore imperative to reduce disparities, inequalities and social exclusion.

Since its independence, the country has embarked on a project of national unity, embedding within its Constitution (Art. 1(2)) the idea of an "indivisible," decentralised unitary state. The country recognises and embraces its diversities, both linguistic and cultural, as part and parcel of the national identity. In pursuing national unity as a tool for improving the social fabric of society, Cameroon has adopted several policies, including regional balance and national integration (Nkwi and Nyamnjoh 2011).

These policies are part of the wider concept of *vivre ensemble* (living together), which successive governments have used since independence. However, rather than a real attempt at recognising and addressing the existing cleavages or grievances in the country, the concept and interventions fabricate a level of national unity that seeks to prevent internal disturbances to the governing process. These policies have done little to mitigate the long-standing grievances of the anglophone regions. In practice, the project of national unity has tended to suppress rather than recognise difference, resulting in deeper perceptions of exclusion and mistrust towards state institutions.

Based on the current situation in the North West and South West regions, it would appear that neither of these policy interventions has addressed the Anglophone Problem. There is limited implementation of the decentralisation process, with powers still centralised in Yaoundé, leading to national disintegration (Mentan 2011). Furthermore, neither national integration nor regional balance, as policies of national unity, has sought to address the question of the anglophone as part of the Cameroon nation, independently of any other group. Indeed, the project of national unity has been imposed on society as a whole without fully considering the imbalances and inequalities that exist. In a deeply fragmented society such as Cameroon, it is difficult not to conclude that the idea of *vivre ensemble* has failed. Perceived and real marginalisation, among other factors, has caused inequality, a breakdown in trust and the questioning of identities, leading to a collapse in social cohesion and continuing conflict in the anglophone regions in Cameroon.

There is a fundamental tension between state-led and society-based approaches to social cohesion in Cameroon. The implementation of *vivre ensemble* by the government is a state-centric model, equating social cohesion to political stability and national unity. This has been pursued through symbolic gestures of inclusion that are state-controlled; the disruption of such gestures is perceived as contrary to the state. There is a need to centralise trust, social justice and participatory inclusion as essential elements for rebuilding fractured relationships (Chan et al. 2006; Langer et al. 2015; UNDP 2009).

Despite the fact that *vivre ensemble* emphasises unity and oneness in diversity, a more bottom-up approach to social cohesion in Cameroon depends on recognition, equitable participation and responsiveness of institutions to citizens. It is against this backdrop that this article next examines attempts at resolution of the conflict as well as post-conflict reconstruction and development aimed at rebuilding social cohesion in the conflict-affected regions. The following section traces these efforts and evaluates how they set the stage for the country's post-conflict recovery agenda.

Towards a Post-Conflict Era: Preparing the Groundwork for PCRD in Cameroon

Since the start of the current conflict in 2016, the government has made strides in addressing the initial issues raised by the lawyers and teachers (Beseng et al. 2023). Despite the fact that attempts at talks between the government and the CACSC failed, and the leaders of this civil society consortium were arrested and put on trial, most of the recommendations made by the CACSC have nonetheless been implemented over the years. These include the translation into English of the OHADA⁶ instruments, which are now available in the two official languages,

6 Organization for the Harmonization in Africa of Business Laws

and the creation of a Common Law Section at the Supreme Court to handle appeals filed against the decisions of lower courts in common law matters. The creation of a Common Law Section at the National School of Administration and Magistracy was accompanied by a programme for the recruitment of English-speaking pupils, judicial and legal officers and court registrars.

In addition, some arrested in connection with the conflict, including the leaders of the CACSC, were released and a stay of proceedings instituted. A national Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multi-culturalism was created to, among other things, carry out an in-depth review of the grievances of the populations in the North West and South West regions. Bilingual teachers have also been recruited to secondary schools.

Attempts to resolve the conflict have led to several quick-fix solutions that have achieved relative calm in the regions. However, discussions around the form of the state, such as a return to federalism and talks on secession, were not included in the initial requests of the CACSC, which at the time focused only on the grievances of lawyers and teachers in the English-speaking regions. These grievances were, however, connected to the demands of the wider population of these regions and the demonstrations were done in concert with and for the benefit of the people. The implementation of the recommendations since the failed negotiations between the government and the CACSC has therefore failed to resolve the conflict, which has since morphed into calls for a return to the federal system of government, a referendum on the form of the state and even secession.

In an attempt to end the conflict, President Paul Biya (2019) convened the Major National Dialogue (MND) in 2019. He stated that the MND would not concern only the population of the North West and South West regions as it was an issue for “national interest such as national unity, national integration and living together” (Ibid., 5). He noted that, among other things, the MND would also focus on issues such as bilingualism, cultural diversity and social cohesion, the reconstruction and development of conflict-affected areas, the return of refugees and displaced persons, the education and judicial systems, decentralisation and local development, the demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants, and the role of the diaspora in the country’s development (Ibid., 6).

The MND took place in the capital city of Yaoundé from 30 September to 4 October 2019, and was chaired by the prime minister and head of government, Dion Ngute. The final report of the dialogue highlighted several consultations with civil society, the general public and the diaspora to gather concerns that would be addressed during the dialogue.⁷ Eight main themes were identified: bilingualism,

7 See <http://dialogue.rdocpdm.cm/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/GDN-Report-du-rapporteur-ge%CC%81ne%CC%81ral.pdf>

cultural diversity and social cohesion; educational system; judicial system; decentralisation and local development; reconstruction and development of crisis-affected regions; return of refugees and internally displaced persons; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants; and the role of diaspora in the crisis and its contribution to development. Commissions were formed and tasked with developing recommendations for their respective themes, rooted in the Constitution of the Republic.

This study focuses its analysis on the recommendations of the commission on reconstruction and development of the crisis-affected regions. The recommendations include:

- Improving bilingual practices across Cameroon and strengthening national social cohesion, which has been undertaken by the commission on bilingualism and multiculturalism.
- Providing 'special status' to the North West and South West regions in line with Article 62 of the Constitution, which was put in place with the promulgation of the 2019 law on the general code of regional and local authorities.
- Enhancing decentralisation and local development in addition to strengthening the financial autonomy of regions.
- Creating a local government public service and increasing transfer of power and resources to local authorities.
- Formulating a Plan for Reconstruction and Development for the North West, South West and Far North regions.

Several of these recommendations are in the nascent stages of implementation and mainly focus on the local governance model, a way of furthering the decentralisation of administrative and public services.

However, the measures put in place to address the conflict have failed to bring peace to the regions. The next section critically examines the PPRD, which is intended to stabilise the regions and promote long-term development. The section interrogates the extent to which the PPRD advances social cohesion not only by addressing horizontal divisions within communities, but also by responding to the vertical divisions between state and citizens that have long fuelled discontent in the anglophone regions. The PPRD emerges within this policy evolution as the main vehicle for translating MND outcomes into tangible recovery efforts.

Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development in Cameroon: The Social Cohesion Nexus

The AU's revised PCRDR policy establishes eight pillars upon which PCRDR on the continent should be developed and implemented as a way of preventing conflict and collectively contributing to addressing the root causes and fostering sustainable peace (AU 2024: 10).⁸

In 2020, the Government of Cameroon, together with its international partners and the UNDP, formulated the PPRDR, a major outcome of the MND. The goals of the PPRDR are to strengthen social cohesion, rehabilitate essential infrastructure and revitalise the local economy. The PPRDR aims to “tie short-term rehabilitation and humanitarian measures with longer-term reconstruction and development interventions” (UNDP and Government of Cameroon 2020: 11). It defines recovery and reconstruction as a “comprehensive process of socio-economic interventions and physical reconstruction, through which households and communities rebuild their assets, restore their livelihoods and strengthen their capacities to manage the impacts of the ongoing crisis” (Ibid.).

The PPRDR mainstreams and places particular focus on the cross-cutting issues of gender equality and youth inclusion to underpin recovery efforts and further humanitarian relief interventions in the conflict-affected regions (Ibid., 22). The PPRDR thus broadly mirrors the indicative pillars in the PCRDR policy, but does not represent a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to building peace and social cohesion.

The PPRDR is built around the National Development Strategy 2020–2030 (NDS30), which is the reference framework for achieving inclusive development in Cameroon. One of the main aims of the PPRDR is to reduce the effects of the crisis on populations of the North West and South West regions and for them to catch up with the rest of country in terms of development (Ibid.). The PPRDR thus addresses the immediate needs of the affected populations in the two regions. However, these are quick-fix solutions rather than efforts to resolve or address the root causes of the conflict.

The PPRDR “arises from key considerations related to development, governance and resilience. It has three important strands: (1) help the communities recover from the impact of the conflict and rebuild their assets and livelihoods with a focus on women, youth and persons with disabilities; (2) rebuild public and community infrastructure to bounce back from the conflict; and (3) develop national capacities and systems through the PPRDR” (Ibid.).

8 These pillars are: political governance and transition; security; humanitarian assistance; socio-economic reconstruction and development; gender, peace and security; human rights, transitional justice and reconciliation; youth inclusion and protection; and environmental security and sustainability.

Elements of social cohesion are interlinked within all the components of the PPRD. The social cohesion component of the PPRD seeks to “restore the sense of national belonging and strengthen social cohesion in the crisis-affected regions. Strengthening social cohesion involves building trust, creating spaces and opportunities for positive interaction and exchange, and working together towards a shared goal” (Government of Cameroon and IsDB 2022: 77). In order to achieve this outcome, the following are envisaged: the reconstruction and upgrade of community-based centres; the provision of training and support to women’s groups/networks to increase women’s capacity in peacebuilding; the provision of lost documents such as birth certificates and national identification cards; as well as socio-cultural activities to foster community trust and understanding.

The plan envisions that these social cohesion interventions will enhance the gains of the economic interventions of revitalising the local economy and rehabilitating essential infrastructure. The social cohesion effort of the PPRD seeks to build horizontal linkages between local communities in the conflict-affected regions of the country, with a specific focus on mainstreaming the participation of youths and women within these processes.

Rebuilding and equipping common community spaces and infrastructure, such as community halls, religious institutions and traditional centres, will foster an enhanced sense of community through socialisation and exchange. Peacebuilding and early warning mechanisms will be localised using context-specific tools such as the cultural and development associations (CDAs) that are central to cultural expression and identity in Cameroon. Socio-cultural activities provide a platform for revitalising communities and allow for a display of normalcy in communities that have been conflict hotspots. Collaboration with civil society, local community-based organisations and religious institutions will provide a strong base for the implementation and success of the PPRD.

The PPRD has the potential to achieve socio-economic benefits for the population of the conflict-affected regions. However, economic development without comprehensive social inclusion, and which fails to address vertical linkages and inequalities between the state and its citizens, will not meet the peacebuilding needs of the population. The current crisis has limited effects on horizontal linkages, which are the main focus of the current PPRD.

As such, sustainable post-conflict development in the country requires socio-economic reconstruction, as well as concurrent efforts at improving trust in institutions. The conflict in the anglophone regions of Cameroon needs a comprehensive and multifaceted intervention. Decentralisation occupies a pivotal place in post-conflict governance and is directly linked to vertical social cohesion. It has emerged as a governance strategy to resolve the conflict, but also to

improve local governance and thus improve the relationship between the state, its institutions and the population.

However, even with the adoption of the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities (Law No. 2019/024),⁹ the limited devolution of authority and fiscal power to local councils constrains citizen participation in reconstruction and undermines the legitimacy of state-led interventions. While the 2019 decentralisation laws and the creation of regional councils were steps forward, their weak operationalisation means that the PPRD remains heavily centralised in design and delivery. This top-down approach restricts the inclusion of local priorities and limits opportunities for citizens to hold decision-makers accountable – two critical conditions for rebuilding trust and strengthening vertical cohesion.

The fact that the PPRD is directly linked to the NDS30, which is aimed at economic and social development of the state, presents the plan from a solely developmental and economic perspective. While the NDS30 is framed around inclusive growth, it is not a conflict-sensitive framework and lacks the specificity needed to address post-conflict realities. By subsuming the PPRD within this broader development vision, the state risks treating a deeply political and identity-based conflict as a development deficit rather than a governance crisis.

Nonetheless, an especially important element, specific to the current conflict, that could improve social cohesion through strengthening vertical linkages, is the initiation of the AU's PCRD pillar of human rights, transitional justice and reconciliation. At the functional level, there is still a need to address the root causes of the conflict, which will provide a sense of trust and *vivre ensemble* and give the conflict-affected population the feeling that the state is increasingly responding to its citizenry. Taken together, these findings suggest that while the PPRD offers an important framework for socio-economic recovery, its limited attention to governance and reconciliation undermines its potential to rebuild trust.

9 See https://cameroonhighcommission.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/law_no_2019_024_2412_2019.pdf

Conclusion

The ongoing conflict in the two majority English-speaking regions of Cameroon has its roots in historical grievances that stem from real or perceived marginalisation, limited participation in the national public and political life, as well as limitations in governance through the centralisation of power. The centralisation of power and the pursuit of a manufactured national unity, embodied in the state-centric social cohesion model of *vivre ensemble* and other similar rhetoric, tend to negate the idea of an anglophone identity.

Attempts at resolving the conflict have done little to address the anglophone crisis, which is the main social cohesion issue that has led to a breakdown in trust between the people and state institutions. The PPRD is largely a post-conflict economic development and reconstruction plan. Its social axis, which hinges on rebuilding the social fabric of conflict-affected communities, focuses on the horizontal aspects of social cohesion to the detriment of vertical aspects, which will do little to resolve the conflict.

Although the PPRD could be a starting point to rebuild communities that have suffered from years of conflict and destruction, it does not address historical grievances or sufficiently attempt to rebuild the relationship between the people and the state. In instances where the goal is to improve this relationship, the onus is placed on communities to be a better fit with the “one and indivisible” nation, negating legitimate grievances.

The current governance structure allows for limited power-sharing, does not facilitate the participation of the citizenry, and does not reflect legitimate decentralisation and local governance. A post-conflict plan is needed that adequately integrates social cohesion and focuses on rebuilding the relationship between the anglophone population and governing institutions. It should ideally include governance reforms in line with the AU’s PCRD policy and be based on principles of human rights and transitional justice. There is a need to recognise and appreciate the historical complexities that exist and also attempt to address the root causes of the problem. This is necessary for peacebuilding and for rebuilding social cohesion.

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Schools as Sanctuaries: How Education Reinvents the Right to Development in Post-Conflict Africa

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ABSTRACT

Education in post-conflict Africa is a social good that can be used to bring about long-term peace and comprehensive development. This article argues that investing in education is a legal obligation based on the right to development and is also crucial in the process of peacebuilding. Using case studies of Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda, the article illustrates the important role that education plays in preventing bureaucracies and the recurrence of conflicts, and building a robust, resilient society. The article discusses the African Union's Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development policy and Agenda 2063 and proposes efforts to enhance peacebuilding. It concludes that schools should be framed as havens where peace is not only taught but also practised, thereby achieving the right to development and lasting stability on the continent.

KEYWORDS

post-conflict reconstruction, education for peace, right to development, African Union, peace education

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Introduction

Sustainable peace is not merely the abandonment of hostilities in post-conflict societies, but includes reconstruction of social institutions that build on human dignity, human rights and development. An important aspect of this reconstruction is the right to development, which is guaranteed in Article 22 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights,³ as well as in the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development (1986).⁴ However, in most post-conflict African scenarios, this right has not been achieved, most notably in the education sector.

The nexus between peace, security and development (PSD) is critical to achieving the goals of post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD). Peace is unsustainable and easily breached when the structural issues leading to conflict, such as inequality, exclusion and marginalisation, are not tackled.

This article argues that education should be central in PCRD as a matter of law and as a strategy to achieve peace. Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda are used as case studies to show how education can help fragile societies to avoid the recurrence of conflict and facilitate inclusive development and sustainable peace, in accordance with the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063.

As a critical aspect of post-conflict recovery, education not only empowers people economically, but is also a transformative tool to rebuild broken relationships in society, reduce hostility and create renewed trust in the government. Inspired by conflict transformation theory, this article highlights the capacity of education to transform identities, facilitate dialogue and empower people, particularly youth and marginalised groups, to contribute actively to development processes.

Methodology

This study, which explores the role of education in post-conflict reconstruction, is based on a comparative case study analysis, as well as a review of AU policy documents and secondary literature such as scholarly works and the reports of global agencies. These sources were analysed and the data synthesised to draw out the patterns, lessons and policy implications of using conflict transformation theory to achieve PSD. Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda were chosen as case study countries based on their different post-conflict trajectories: successful reconciliation through education in Rwanda; current challenges due to the lack of

3 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter), adopted 27 June 1981, OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/67/3 rev. 5, 21 I.L.M. 58 (1982), entered into force 21 October 1986. See <https://achpr.au.int/en/node/641>

4 See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/rtd.pdf>

education in South Sudan; and the inclusive approach to the education of refugees in Uganda.

Theoretical and Policy Framework, the PSD Nexus and the Right to Development

The AU's (2024) revised PCRD policy notes that in order to attain sustainable peace in post-conflict societies in Africa, the cessation of violence is not enough. Rather, it requires putting an end to political, economic and social systems that cause the conflict. This is exemplified in the PSD nexus, with the three elements being mutually supportive and constituting the pillars of stability. Unless there is all-encompassing growth, peace cannot exist, and without security, development is jeopardised.

This article uses American theorist John Paul Lederach's (1996) theory of conflict transformation, which carries significant weight in the sphere of peacebuilding. In contrast to various traditional conflict resolution models that are focused on short-term solutions, conflict transformation theory advocates that parties address the root causes of conflict, restore relationships broken during the conflict, and develop new social systems in which social actors feel justified, included and represented. It does not consider peace as an event, but rather as a long-term process of societal transformation. Social change is effected by transforming relationships among individuals, groups and institutions after violence has occurred.

Education is relevant and necessary in this transformation process as a vehicle for healing and reconstruction in post-conflict environments in Africa. Education in these contexts is not about learning to write, but about imparting values and fostering communication and empathy. This is crucial in order to empower and restore disintegrated social ties. Conflict transformation considers education to be about creating a place where a new discourse of living together, reconciliation and a common future can be built.

The right to development as enshrined in the African Charter and other international human rights treaties supplements this strategy because it approaches development in terms of the legal and moral rights of all human beings. Development is not just about economic processes. Rather, it includes recovering agency and dignity, as well as the ability to be part of society, which is necessary for enduring peace. In precarious post-conflict settings, education facilitates the implementation of this right by broadening opportunities, diminishing imbalances and strengthening deprived groups, especially women and youth, who tend to be more vulnerable than others during conflicts. They face targeted sexual violence, forced recruitment, loss of family and education, and long-term economic exclusion without the means of defending themselves or escaping.

Pillar 4 (Socio-Economic Reconstruction and Development) of the PCRD policy (AU 2024) expressly states the need for education to create resilient societies in post-conflict situations. It is cited as a key factor in long-term development. However, in most African states there is a lack of investment in the education sector during reconstruction. Education is placed on the back burner due to limited resources, a lack of political will and competing priorities. This leaves the factors that drive conflict unaddressed.

This article proposes that rather than being sidelined, education should be transformed to play a core role in peacebuilding. Schools should function not only as academic institutions of learning, but also as places of safety where historical wrongs are addressed, tolerance and dialogue are nurtured and new social relationships are developed. This entails incorporating peace education, civic education and trauma recovery programmes into national curricula, as well as investing in teacher training and resources.

Education also contributes to reshaping both vertical relationships (between citizens and the state), through restoring trust in institutions and the government, and horizontal relationships (between different groups of people in a community), through creating understanding and cooperation. Education thus facilitates reconciliation and also restores the social contract, both of which are crucial in the process of conflict transformation.

In sum, peace cannot be achieved without overcoming systemic inequalities and restoring damaged relationships, both of which are often at the root of violence. Education is a potent mechanism through which to address the past and prepare for a peaceful future.

Right to Development in Post-War Africa

The right to development secures the right for individuals and communities to engage in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social and political development. It is a legal right that forms the basis of human dignity, equality and sustainable peace. However, this right is often unrealised, especially in weak and post-conflict states in Africa. The inability to access or influence development processes can leave people mired in poverty, exclusion and violence, which can lead to new cycles of violence or destroy nascent peace.

Reconstruction processes that do not prioritise the right to development are likely to uphold the injustices and inequalities that caused the initial violence. In the absence of concrete socio-economic prospects, youths, displaced refugees and outcast groups are frequently disenfranchised and become increasingly polarised. Development should thus be prioritised as a peacebuilding measure and a human right in post-conflict situations.

Education plays an instrumental role in achieving this. First, education leads to economic diversification as people are provided with the skills, knowledge and creativity to engage in the economy in industries other than the conventional ones of agriculture or the extractives. In post-conflict economies, where formal employment opportunities are often scarce, people need an avenue to create their own businesses, innovate and diversify their livelihoods. Education can offer that avenue and lead to sustainable development.

Second, education promotes national cohesion in post-war societies. Schools can function as sites where people of different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds learn to develop trust and a sense of common nationality. Post-conflict societies have the opportunity to transform narratives of division and introduce narratives of tolerance, dialogue and reconciliation. This can be done from a young age by integrating peace education, civic education and conflict resolution into school curricula.

Third, education equips young people with knowledge but also provides psychosocial and life skills and values which facilitate peaceful coexistence and democratic ways of life. In many post-conflict settings, youths resort to criminality and perpetrate violence. This is because war destroys schools, families and jobs, leaving youths idle, traumatised and without legal means to survive. Educating youths is thus key to ending the cycle of violence and motivating them to be peacemakers.

The PCRDR policy (AU 2024) notes the imperative of closing the gap between humanitarian aid and long-term development. It acknowledges that humanitarian assistance is not sufficient for enduring peace. Long-term development, based on the realisation of rights, is thus key to stabilising post-conflict states. Education can be used as the vehicle to link immediate and long-term goals: it stimulates development and establishes the foundation of sustainable peace by addressing the structural antecedents of conflict, including inequality, marginality and unemployment.

Education also promotes state legitimacy and renews the social contract between citizens and governments. A state's prioritisation of equal access to education is an indicator that it is concerned about the welfare of the citizenry. This solidifies governance and offers protection against possible conflict relapse. Conversely, failure to invest in education may foster feelings of marginalisation or indicate lack of care by the state, which undermines progress in peace processes.

The right to development in post-war Africa will not be attainable without placing education centre stage. Education empowers individuals and functions as a socially cohesive tool. All meaningful peacebuilding agendas should therefore include educational investment as part of their developmental and peacebuilding strategies, in line with the aspirations of the AU's Agenda 2063.

Education as an Instrument for Peacebuilding: Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda

Rwanda: From Genocide to National Peace and Unity Through Education

The 1994 Rwanda genocide left in its wake not only the material destruction of people and their communities but also severe psychic scars within the nation. Families were broken and trust among neighbours was lost. The task of rebuilding Rwanda went beyond constructing roads, houses and institutions to include healing hearts, reconstituting trust and redefining what it meant to be a Rwandan.

The Rwandan government put education at the heart of its reconciliation and recovery process. Schools became more than centres of learning – they were places of healing, where the next generation could be educated about peace, unity and common humanity. A national unity curriculum, peace education and changes to history teaching aimed to take the nation past the ethnic divisions that had fuelled the genocide. This was not in an attempt to forget the past but to transform it into a common memory and the framework for dialogue and coexistence.

One aspect of this process was the establishment of Unity Clubs at schools – places where youth were safe to tell stories; talk about forgiveness, active citizenship and social responsibilities; and imagine an alternative, brighter future.

However, despite the education system encouraging social integration and rebuilding the nation, some have expressed concerns (Lee 2023) about the lack of critical thinking, free speech and discussion of history. This is the danger of silencing disagreement and difficult conversations about the past in the name of unity. Critical inquiries are needed into how a society can reconcile and develop democratic ideals without gagging freedom of expression.

Nonetheless, the Rwandan experience demonstrates the transforming role of education in post-conflict healing. It highlights that schools are not just places of teaching, but can also be havens where the roots of peace are planted, trauma can start to be healed, and the youth can be taught not to see each other as adversaries, but as people who share a common future. The experience of Rwanda reminds us that although peace commences with treaties, it is maintained in classrooms.

South Sudan: Educational Neglect and its Consequences

In contrast, South Sudan illustrates that an unprioritised education sector can lead to a fragile post-conflict society in terms of peacebuilding and economic

development. Since gaining independence in 2011, South Sudan has faced constant cycles of violence, political instability and humanitarian crises.

Millions of children, particularly those in areas that are affected by the conflicts, do not have access to education. The situation is exacerbated by an insufficient number of teachers, poor retention rates and lack of curricula on peace. Unemployed young people with no political or financial resources and high rates of illiteracy are more readily induced into armed groups or into cycles of violence.

The right to development in South Sudan will never be achieved unless there is a profound investment in education. Without it, the prospect of everlasting peace will repeatedly be put on the back burner. Education is a social good and needs to be included in South Sudan's peacebuilding agenda. The absence of education in post-conflict contexts risks escalating or reigniting conflict, worsening poverty and compromising the state-building process.

Uganda: Optimism Represented by Refugee Education

Uganda is an encouraging example of a country that has used education to actively engage in building resilience, social cohesion and economic development in a compromised context. Uganda hosts 1.5 million refugees, the highest number in Africa. As a result, the Ugandan government liberalised its policy towards refugees, enabling them to be part of mainstream education in the country.⁵ By providing access to quality education for both refugee and Ugandan children, the government has facilitated peaceful coexistence, minimised tension between refugee and host communities, and provided opportunities for social integration.

Furthermore, the Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities in Uganda (ERP), initiated by the government together with humanitarian organisations and development partners, exemplifies the principle of education being beneficial both as a short-term humanitarian intervention and as a long-term peacebuilding objective (Ministry of Education and Sports 2018). The ERP is concerned with building schools, training teachers and providing psychosocial care to refugee and host communities.

In addition to meeting humanitarian requirements, education in this context has also played a part in economic integration and self-sustenance among refugees, hence decreasing their risk of becoming targets of exploitation or being marginalised. The Ugandan example shows that inclusive education systems not only nurture resilience to displacement, but also function as a platform for sustainable development and peace.

5 This was effected through various policies and frameworks: the Refugee Act 2006, Refugee Regulations 2010, Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework for Uganda and the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017–2020.

Lessons Learned and Comparative Analysis

The three case studies demonstrate that education should not be an add-on in post-conflict recovery, but rather a key ingredient of it. Education needs to be mainstreamed as an essential component in all post-conflict reconstruction processes. Additionally, the right to development must be translated into concrete processes. Education can help societies to deal with the origins of conflict, provide young people with effective alternatives to violence, and create a platform to advance all-inclusive development, as per the objectives of Agenda 2063 and the PCRD policy.

The comparative analysis of Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda highlights important lessons that can be used to guide nations and the continent in the use of education as a peacebuilding and post-conflict development tool. Among the most critical lessons is political commitment. This is needed to effectively incorporate education into peacebuilding strategies. As the examples of Rwanda and Uganda show, once a political decision has been taken to focus on education, policies can be actualised and schools used as centres of reconciliation, resilience and inclusive development.

In Rwanda, the post-genocide reforms to education were connected to the government's deliberate political decision to repair the national identity and avoid further violence in the country. Similarly, the Ugandan government granted refugee children access to national education systems in order to foster social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

However, in situations of post-conflict reconstruction where there is no strong leadership and policy guidance, education is still marginalised and its role as a peacebuilding tool is not utilised.

Another lesson is that inclusivity in educational access and policymaking is imperative. In South Sudan, for example, the state's failure to include major groups, particularly young people in conflict-affected areas, led to an increase in inequality and fuelled further instability and new episodes of violence. Systems of education that do not extend to everyone result in social and economic inequalities that may trigger feelings of resentment and hostility.

Equitable and inclusive education policies thus need to be implemented to ensure that no one is left behind in the process of post-conflict reconstruction, especially displaced populations, ethnic minorities, girls, and children with disabilities. Education should play the role of uniting rather than dividing.

Peace education was not integrated into educational curricula in South Sudan, but it was in the post-genocide reforms of Rwanda. Peace education involves

imparting knowledge, but also reshaping values, attitudes and actions oriented towards reconciliation, tolerance and non-violent conflict resolution. In post-war societies where trauma and distrust prevail, peace education may be a means to resolve old disputes, empathise with others and foster a culture of dialogue. It should be incorporated not only to ensure no future conflict, but to raise generations that are devoted to the principle of being politically involved and ensuring the integrity of diversity.

As the case studies reveal, education intersects with other objectives such as gender equality, youth empowerment and social justice. Post-conflict education cannot operate in a silo. Gender-sensitive learning policies, for example, can be a radical force for change in societies where women and girls have historically been marginalised.

Similarly, education can provide the younger generation with economic opportunities that divert them from engaging in activities that lead to civil wars. An example is the case of providing education to refugees in Uganda. Education contributes to peacebuilding but also to economic involvement and resilience, showcasing its multidimensional advantages.

Collectively, these lessons point to the need for a comprehensive, rights-based educational approach in post-conflict Africa. Factors such as political will, inclusivity, peace education and intersectionality should be integrated so that education is provided not only as a social service, but as a crucial component of peacebuilding and development. These study results support the right to development and to education-based post-conflict policies as outlined in the AU's PCRD policy and Agenda 2063.

Policy Recommendations for the AU

In implementing the right to development as part of the AU's PCRD strategy, urgent, innovation-based and inclusive educational approaches are needed. First, the AU should develop continent-wide programmes in peace education as well as trainings of teachers specifically tailored towards post-conflict environments. Teachers of such programmes should be given the means to provide education to reduce the impact of conflict, to reconcile and to provide civic values based on human rights and tolerance.

Second, to assist in the reconstruction of schools, especially in regions impacted during conflict, the AU should establish a Post-Conflict School Infrastructure and Technology Fund. This fund must also focus on digital learning prospects and ensure that children in isolated or sensitive environments are not neglected.

Third, the AU should ensure that member states' laws and national policies on development incorporate the right to development. Education should be acknowledged not only as a development priority but also as an essential right that is at the core of national peacebuilding approaches.

Fourth, it is important to develop multi-stakeholder partnerships. The AU should support United Nations agencies, civil society organisations and actors in the private sector in their efforts to mobilise financial resources, technical expertise and innovation. These alliances would increase the reach and efficiency of post-conflict reconstruction.

Finally, there needs to be a robust gender-sensitive approach to all educational activities. The AU and member states must ensure that girls are given access to education in post-conflict regions. Socio-cultural and economic factors that obstruct the admission of girls into the school system must be eliminated. Educating girls is not merely a moral necessity but also an effective way of developing stronger and more peaceful nations.

In implementing these recommendations, the AU will make education a priority sector and a means of transformation that enhances the right to development, promotes peacebuilding and guarantees the long-term stability of Africa.

Conclusion

The right to development is not only a moral imperative but also a peace strategy in post-conflict Africa. Education is a means through which to foster peace, reconciliation and resilience. Schools should be places of refuge and healing where the youth are educated not only with knowledge but also with the skills to construct a peaceful future. Through placing education at the centre of its PCRD strategy, the AU can help break cycles of violence and transform fragile states into inclusive and sustainable ones.

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The Nexus of Legal Imperatives and Development Realities: The Right to Development as a Catalyst for Post-Conflict Transformation in Africa: Case Studies and Comparative Insights

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the right to development as a legal duty and strategic medium for post-conflict reconstruction in Africa. Drawing from examples in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Colombia, it examines how constitutions, institutions and financing systems can promote equitable growth. Hybrid judicial systems that support development rights, participatory governance that fosters local ownership, and creative resource mobilisation are identified as three main levers. The analysis concludes that success requires a linkage of global norms and domestic realities – evidenced in the Rwandan Gacaca courts and Colombian PDET schemes. Meanwhile, a country such as South Sudan suffers from institutional paralysis. This suggests that the African Union and its member countries should deploy AI-based surveillance systems, adopt bottom-up budgeting and engage in South–South policy exchanges. Integrating blueprints and strategies for peacebuilding into peacebuilding frameworks may help countries turn the aspirations of Agenda 2063 into practical action, in a sustainable manner that links peace, justice and development.

KEYWORDS

right to development, post-conflict reconstruction, participatory governance, legal obligation, resource mobilisation

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Introduction

The paradox of legal obligations and developmental imperatives in post-conflict Africa remains an enduring dilemma. Despite its strong anchorage in international and regional instruments – including the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Right to Development (1986) and Article 22 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights – the impact is sparingly felt (Adebajo 2023a; AU 2024a). The gap between normative commitment and lived reality raises a fundamental question: why do post-conflict states fail to deploy this right? Economic guarantees often unravel in the face of weak institutions, fractured governance and short-term post-crisis exigencies (OECD 2024a; World Bank 2023a).

The heart of the problem is that, although the right to development constitutes a powerful legal norm (Adebajo 2023a; AU 2024a), it is, in practice, circumscribed by fragility (OECD 2024a; World Bank 2023b). It is this tension – between the right as an end and its use value (AU 2024b; World Bank 2025a) – which begs the question of how effective operationalisation, such as that witnessed in Rwanda in terms of constitutional reform (Government of Rwanda 2023a), can contribute to recovery and stabilisation. This article contends that such a vision of the right to development should be reconceptualised as a dynamic mechanism of systemic change in the legality-peace-security-development (LPSD) nexus (Khadiagala 2022a).

The African Union’s (AU) revised policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) (African Union Commission 2024) makes development central to peacebuilding. However, a gap remains in implementing this normative environment, especially in fragile countries such as South Sudan, where legal aspirations exceed institutional capacity (AU 2024b; World Bank 2025b). This rift spawns cycles of fragility and begs urgent reflection: does the right to development, when properly operationalised, offer a potential impulse for sustainable peace? What is there to learn from Rwanda’s justice-oriented constitutional reforms (Government of Rwanda 2023b) and Colombia’s Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (Programmes for Development with a Territorial Focus, or PDET) (Government of Colombia 2024a)?

Based on the LPSD nexus, this article examines how legal forms, synchronised with participatory governance and resource mobilisation, may change post-conflict recovery (Government of Colombia 2024b; TRC-SL 2022a). The analysis is consistent with the AU’s Agenda 2063 (AUC 2024) and the Pact for the Future of the United Nations Development Programme,² both of which emphasise approaches that link peace and development. The study stresses the need to move from rhetorical affirmation to practical realisation, and frames the right to development as a living, operative tool of state reconstruction.

2 See <https://www.un.org/pact-for-the-future/en>

This article begins by setting out the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the right to development within international and African legal frameworks, with emphasis on its LPD nexus. It then explains the research approach and data sources used to explore how this right operates in post-conflict settings. The main body of the article analyses evidence from Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Mozambique and Colombia to assess how legal norms, participatory governance and resource mobilisation interact during recovery. The discussion distils key levers that encourage operationalisation and identifies practical tools to bridge the gap between legal commitments and developmental outcomes. The sections that follow are devoted to policy implications and analytical contributions. Issues related to future policy applications are raised, as well as recommendations for the AU and member states.

The case studies – Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Mozambique and Colombia – span diverse post-conflict contexts, enabling comparative analysis rather than regional extrapolation. Colombia is a leading case study in this regard, as its peace agreement incorporated developmental measures, including the PDETs. This incorporation represents an important benchmark for comparing Africa’s experiences with those of other regions.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to achieve three interconnected aims by investigating how the right to development can be a transformative force in post-conflict Africa.

First, it explores the legal and normative underpinnings of this right, centring on its codification in instruments such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (Article 22) and the AU’s (2024c) PCR policy. Through a review of these frameworks, the research identifies the disjunction between aspiration and enforceability – a problem evident in fragile settings such as South Sudan (AU 2024b; World Bank 2023). This analysis highlights the importance of translating legal norms into practical policy, notably via compliance with the AU Peace Fund Strategy 2023–2025 and Regional Economic Community (REC) post-conflict policies (IGAD 2024).

Second, it examines how the right to development has functioned as a link between peacebuilding and socio-economic change. Building upon the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s *States of Fragility* report (OECD 2024c), it examines how such legal norms are operationalised, with a specific focus on post-1994 institutional reform in Rwanda (Government of Rwanda 2023c) and reparations programmes in Sierra Leone (TRC-SL 2022a). This target reflects the catalytic role of participatory governance and resource mobilisation, key aspects of the PSD paradigm (Khadiagala 2022a).

Third, the article draws comparative implications from African cases (Rwanda, Mozambique and South Sudan) and the global reference point of Colombia's 2016 Peace Accord (Government of Colombia 2024a). Through this comparison, the study distils some transferable lessons about how best to link the legal imperative with developmental necessity as promoted by Agenda 2063 (AUC 2024).

Significance of the Research

This study makes a relevant contribution to the ongoing discourses about reconstruction in post-conflict Africa. It contributes to the implementation of the PCRD (AUC 2024) by facilitating evidence-based recommendations to reinforce its pillar on socio-economic development. Specifically, the findings contribute to the operationalisation of Pillar 4 on institution-building and moving from relief to development (AUC 2024).

The importance of this study extends beyond Africa; it also contributes to global development agendas. It supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16 on peaceful societies, justice and strong institutions. By drawing attention to hybrid legal systems and participatory governance, the study also suggests concrete pathways for operationalising SDG 16.3's aspiration to equal justice, a goal that post-conflict societies often fail to achieve.

This also complements Agenda 2063, which envisages "a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development" (AUC 2024: Aspiration 1). By illustrating not only how development rights can break the cycle of conflict and fragility, but also by engaging with practical tactics to realise Aspiration 1, the research informs on-the-ground strategies.

The work also responds to the Pact for the Future, which recommends integrated peacebuilding strategies. In this analysis of the PSD nexus, the article empirically affirms the Pact's core assumption that sustainable peace is predicated on addressing the development causes of conflict. Colombia's Programme for Forcible and Voluntary Eradication of Illicit Crops (PDEV) illustrates such a combination in practice, while the African examples demonstrate how this type of approach could be adapted at the local level.

However, the most important aspect of this study is its attempt to connect legal logic to field practice. In doing so, this article draws lessons for both policymakers and practitioners on the extent to which frameworks like the UN Declaration on the Right to Development (1986) work, or do not work, in a post-conflict setting. This kind of comparison between "African experience" (Rwanda and Sierra Leone) and the global standard (Colombia) has lessons for how to make the right to development a practical, transformative instrument (Government of Colombia 2024a; Government of Rwanda 2023c).

This attention to both theoretical underpinnings and policy relevance – enabled through communication with a variety of actors, ranging from AU decision-makers to international development partners – contributes to scholarship on the PSD nexus (Khadiagala 2022a; OECD 2024c).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This article is situated within three central legal frameworks: the UN Declaration on the Right to Development (1986), which defines development as an “inalienable human right”; Article 22 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, which proclaims people’s natural right to economic, social and cultural development; and the AU’s PCRD policy, which operationalises these principles within post-conflict contexts (AU 2024b).

While these frameworks spell out development as a right, they are weakly enforced, especially in fragile states where the judiciary’s capacity and autonomy are compromised (Adebajo 2023a; World Bank 2025c). This divergence between legal status and implementation calls for reconsidering how rights to development better fit grounds-based justiciability.

Rajagopal’s (2024) criticism of top-down international legalism underscores the limitations of externally driven frameworks, which generally suppress local agency. Similarly, Clark and Ratner’s (2018) examination of distant justice highlights the tension between international justice mechanisms and local processes, suggesting hybrid instruments that align with community norms to enhance legitimacy. The Gacaca courts in Rwanda exemplify how indigenous avenues of justice can facilitate the localisation of the right to development by combining accountability and social reintegration (Clark and Ratner 2018; Government of Rwanda 2023c).

The PSD Nexus

Going beyond silo approaches, this article employs the PSD nexus as an analytical lens. The OECD (2024c) fragility lens shows that dichotomous interventions, which fragment peacebuilding, governance and development, increase rather than reduce fragility. On the other hand, comprehensive approaches like Rwanda’s post-genocide renewal demonstrate that peace and development, as processes, mutually reinforce each other when relevant institutional complementarities are at work (Government of Rwanda 2023c; OECD 2024c).

This view is particularly applicable to Africa, where around 60% of conflicts re-erupt within ten years due to the failure to address the developmental underpinnings of insecurity (OECD 2024c; UNDP 2025c). Drawing on the PSD nexus, the article positions the right to development as more than a legal norm,

but a strategic framework that connects governance to justice and inclusive growth (AUC 2024; Khadiagala 2022a).

Catalytic Pathways

Two ways in which legal framing can act as a catalyst are identified by the analytical frame:

- Redistributive justice: Land reform under the 2016 Peace Accord in Colombia and reparations programmes in Sierra Leone (Government of Colombia 2024a; TRC-SL 2022a) demonstrate how addressing economic inequality and historical dispossession leads to a decreased risk for conflict relapse.
- Governance for all: The Senegalese National Development Strategy (2025) illustrates inclusive governance that involves the voices of those marginalised in national decision-making processes to enhance legitimacy and accountability (AfDB 2021).

These pathways are consistent with Sen's (2001) *Development as Freedom*, which contends that post-conflict recovery relies on enlarging individuals' substantive freedoms, or the ability to act as agents to promote change. Drawing on Sen's capability approach, this article examines how legal recognition of a right to development might foster local agency, empower communities and contribute to peace.

Methodological Approaches

This study uses a qualitative comparative case study approach to analyse the role of the right to development as a driver of post-conflict transformation. The method connects theory and practice, merging analysis with grassroots empirical findings.

Case Selection

Four African examples (Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Mozambique) are reviewed against Colombia as a worldwide standard. A positive example of institutionalisation is Rwanda, which has done so through constitutional reform and community justice. Sierra Leone gives an example of limited implementation through its Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). South Sudan illustrates the enduring constraints of low institutional capacity, while Mozambique exemplifies policies that have generated dividends through rural-based disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) initiatives (AU 2024b; World Bank 2025b). The 2016 Peace Accord in Colombia provides an external benchmark for how development should be incorporated into the core of transitional justice mechanisms (Government of Colombia 2024a).

Data Collection

National policy documents, peace agreements, AU and UN reports and REC instruments (e.g. IGAD 2024) were reviewed. These sources offer authoritative interpretations of how development effects are expressed and applied. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed studies, non-governmental organisation evaluations, and World Bank and OECD fragility assessments, which complement these primary resources by providing depth of context (OECD 2024b; World Bank 2023b).

Analytical Strategy

To enhance the credibility of its methodology, this study uses a process to trace the causal mechanisms linking legal norms to development-related effects. This method points to critical junctures that lead an institution toward or away from transformation. In Rwanda, for example, process tracing shows how Gacaca courts promoted justice and economic reintegration by rebuilding community trust (Clark and Ratner 2018; Government of Rwanda 2023a).

In addition, thematic analysis is used to identify the broader themes that cut across case studies (for example, institutional capacity development, sub-collective governance and resource prospecting) in the utilisation of NVivo for systematic coding. These mixed methods enable the research to show us structural conditions that make the right to development a practical tool for peace and transformation.

By combining these techniques, the research maintains its academic integrity while still making strategic contributions to policy. Its power lies in its ability to pit normative aspirations against realities on the ground, thereby providing a holistic socio-economic picture of how the right to development can fuel sustainable recovery across various post-conflict settings.

Case Studies and Comparative Analysis

This section compares the experiences of Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Mozambique to demonstrate the relevance of the right to development in post-conflict reconstruction. Colombia is a world precedent for studying how legal regimes and community-driven tactics work together (or against each other) to deliver sustainable results.

Rwanda is a potential exemplar of the institutionalisation of post-conflict rights to development. The 2003 Constitution enshrined socio-economic rights and introduced participatory mechanisms such as the Gacaca courts, which combined justice with reconciliation and development at the community level

(Government of Rwanda 2023a). Such changes delivered measurable social advances: primary school enrolment increased from 64% in 2000 to 98% in 2020 (World Bank 2023). However, as Adebajo (2023a) admonished, this success was achieved at the expense of political pluralism and a narrow civic space, reflecting the tension between developmental efficacy on the one hand and participatory governance on the other (Clark and Ratner 2018).

In Sierra Leone, despite the TRC that linked justice to material reparations, such as education and healthcare, for victims of war (TRC-SL 2022a), there were implementation delays – only 32% of reparations were funded in the first ten years (UNDP 2025b). Earmarked, donor-driven financing and unpredictable aid flows frequently undermine country ownership. Similarly, rights-based commitments are hollow unless backed by predictable financing and institutional autonomy that allow local actors to sustain and enforce those rights (Gautier and Jesson 2017; Gotsadze et al. 2019; OECD 2008).

In the experience of South Sudan, implementation has not followed recognition of development rights in statutes. Although formally aligned with the AU's PCRD policy (AU 2024b), weak governance and elite capture continue. In 2023, health and education received just 7% of the national budget (World Bank 2025b), indicating an enormous implementation gap. This failure also illustrates that institutional capacity is a necessary condition for the realisation of juristic rights (Rajagopal 2024).

A more optimistic example is Mozambique, whose DDR programmes have absorbed former combatants into agricultural cooperatives (OECD 2024a). Through linking peacebuilding with livelihood promotion, Mozambique turned would-be spoilers into agents of development. Liaga and Badmoussi (2025) contend that "context-sensitive" interventions can show how the AU's technical assistance could more effectively tackle "elite" resistance – a recurrent obstacle in fragile post-conflict countries.

Three factors are important for successful implementation across all cases:

- Constitutional entrenchment (as in Rwanda and Colombia) of development rights versus a symbolic embrace (as in South Sudan).
- Sustainability of implementation financing mechanisms (Sierra Leone's minimal reparations versus Mozambique's donor-driven DDR).
- Participatory architecture with local ownership (cooperatives approach in Mozambique versus central planning in Rwanda).

The contrast with Colombia here is instructive. The 2016 Peace Accord introduced PDETs (Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial) – regional development plans institutionalising transitional justice through territorial equity

(Government of Colombia 2024a). This comprehensive approach led to a 37% drop in recorded violence in implementation regions and reinforced citizen involvement in local administration (Garzón 2024). Its focus on subnational design also carries important implications for Africa, where centre–periphery disparities are often observed.

Table 1: Mapping case studies to catalytic levers

Case studies	Legal framework/entrenchment	Participatory governance	Financing mechanisms	Key data sources and variables
Rwanda	Constitutional entrenchment (2003 Constitution); hybrid system, Gacaca court system, integrating justice and development	Centralised governance is a category characterised by communal aspects through Gacaca courts and reconciliation	Public investment in the social sectors will be maintained (e.g. 98% primary school completion rates by 2020)	2003 Constitution (Government of Rwanda 2023e); World Bank (www.worldbank.org_2023) enrolment data
Sierra Leone	Justice-based TRC model to justice, reparations and other socio-economic support for victims	Victim-centred, participatory process which focuses on local needs and reconciliation	External donor dependence: 32% of the recommended reparations were financed in the first ten years	TRC-SL (2022a); Final Report: UNDP (2025b) Resources received
South Sudan	Adoption of rights in spirit with respect to development (constitutional provisions virtually not operational)	A deficit of local participation or institutions that work	Learning crisis: just 7% of the 2023 budget will be dedicated to health and education	World Bank (2025c) public expenditure review; AU (2024b) institutional assessment
Mozambique	Integrating DDR in the context of rural land reform and reintegration	Rural-led participative approach that integrates ex-combatants in agricultural cooperatives	Donor-aligned funding streams provide support for DDR programmes, and stimulate local livelihoods	OECD (2024a) DDR reports; Liaga and Badmoussi (2025) analysis
Colombia	Global best practice: Peace Accord comprising legality and institutionality to justice and development (2016) causal chain	Perspective subnational tailoring through PDETs with focus on local co-design	Targeted but equitable geographic-specific funding in regions and PDETs	Government of Colombia (2024a) reports on Peace Accord and PDET implementation

Source: Compiled by author

Global Benchmark: Colombia's Integrated Approach to Post-Conflict Development

Colombia's 2016 Peace Accord is one of the most holistic attempts to operationalise the right to development in a post-conflict context and provides valuable lessons for African states. The Colombian government's June 2024 progress report notes that the PDETs envisaged by the accord constitute a comprehensive framework to articulate, at the territorial level, transitional justice and socio-economic transformation in 16 priority regions. Sen (2001) advances a similar idea, arguing that sustainable peace rests on expanding the scope of substantive freedoms to address structural inequalities. Colombia's PDETs are, as García-Godos (2023) points out, a way of looking at how development and justice meet where local participation is the driver – a model of "territorial peace" that may serve as a learning resource in such post-conflict African contexts.

The land reform provisions of the accord sought to formalise titles over seven million hectares, 33% of which were for female-headed households (Government of Colombia 2024a). This aligns with the UN Declaration on the Right to Development (1986), which asserts that equity and gender-balanced asset distribution foster social cohesion, peacebuilding and inclusive growth. The reparations mechanism consisted of individual compensation (on average, USD104) and community projects, providing evidence for both individual and general restitution – "a holistic" approach, as described in the AU's PCRD policy (2024).

In hybrid governance terms, Colombia's institutions offer lessons. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), as examined by Khadiagala (2022a), combines restorative justice with the enforcement of development rights, and is an example of the potential for legal innovation to contribute to lasting peace. The participatory Territorial Development Councils, in turn, serve to further operationalise what the OECD (2024c) argues is crucial for stability: local-level ownership of development processes. In financial terms, the peace dividends mechanism in Colombia, transferring 0.5% of GDP annually, demonstrates how reliable domestic funding can underpin lasting change (World Bank 2023a).

The sequenced "security first, justice and development second" approach taken by Colombia is particularly relevant for African policymakers who believe that Rwanda's experience post-1994 can provide a viable framework for recovery (Government of Rwanda 2023c). However, as the AU (2024a) stated in its PCRD policy guidelines, successful replication would entail context-specific adjustments, especially regarding Africa's plural land tenure systems. Colombia's dilemmas are also cautionary. Elite opposition retarded the redistribution of land in a manner which resonates with South Sudan's governance weaknesses (World Bank 2025c), while commodity reliance was a source of fiscal vulnerability (AfDB 2024a).

The AU revised PCRDR policy process is providing early insights, and three lessons are emerging:

- Legal precision in peace accords, such as the 600-plus decrees implementing Colombia.
- Long-term financing horizons are projected in Colombia's 15-year plan for peace.
- Hybrid governance arrangements that combine international norms with local institutional problem-solving.

Eventually, as the UNDP (2025b) observes, Colombia moved away from development-as-aid to reparations, a model that now features prominently in Africa's PCRDR architecture. The ongoing challenge is how to embed these principles across a variety of African institutional settings while preserving the core aspiration of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development (1986): development as an indivisible human right.

Major Analytical Contributions and Policy Implications

This comparative study generates three key lessons for the realisation of the right to development in post-conflict settings. Autesserre's (2023) demand for hyper-local peacebuilding bolsters this point by advocating a decentralised, community-driven prescriptive approach.

First, the study evidences how the legal infrastructure of development rights shapes their actual value. Rwanda and Colombia demonstrate that constitutional or legally institutionalised rights can give rise to justiciable demands and organised implementation, whereas the symbolic inclusion of South Sudan has led to an aspirational policy with no purchase. Institutional design, whether Rwanda's use of Gacaca courts or Colombia's PDETs, determines the extent to which development frameworks can be transformational.

Second, sustainable financing remains pivotal. Sierra Leone's liquidations-based reparations and Mozambique's donor-funded DDR programmes pale in comparison to Colombia's institutionalised "peace dividends", confirming the importance of predictable, nationally owned financing.

Third, participatory governance is at the centre of sustained recovery. Cooperatives in Mozambique and regional councils in Colombia illustrate how to work with affected communities as co-authors of their development, building both legitimacy and resilience. Overcentralisation risks dependency and disenfranchisement.

Subnational development funds can help reconcile central control and local empowerment, as provided for in the AU's PCRDR framework. National

governments must constitutionally dedicate minimum development-rights budgets to ensure accountability. International partners, meanwhile, need to take long-term, flexible financing horizons, such as those of Colombia's 15-year model. Together, these contributions help fill the divide between right and reality, mapping a way forward from rights-based language to post-conflict change.

Enhanced Perspectives on Policy Applications

The empirical evidence calls for practical tools that render comparative knowledge into applied instruments for policy- and decision-makers working on post-conflict development. These must address the space between principle and practice by institutionalising three essential tools.

First, the constitutional drafting principles need to move beyond an abstract recognition of development rights to incorporate enforceable mechanisms. Constitutional benchmarks for menu design should, *inter alia*, be based on the Government of Rwanda (2023a) and the Government of Colombia (2024a) in the post-2016 Accord period. There should be:

- Mandatory minimum levels of budget allocations; 30% best practice for core social sectors (health, education, housing).
- Independent oversight and audit entities to verify compliance.
- Direct procedural standing for individuals and civil society, enabling them to raise rights-related claims.

The counter-example of South Sudan highlights the risks associated with solely declaratory constitutional rights. In this case, a lack of procedural cues renders food security entitlements aspirational rather than actionable (AU 2024a; World Bank 2025c).

Second, prototypes of funding mechanisms should be both sustainable and adaptable. Colombia's mechanism of dedicating 5% of mineral royalties to its PDETs provides a clear example of how domestic revenue anchoring can increase ownership and sustainability (Government of Colombia 2024a). Mozambique's reintegration programmes in the aftermath of conflict also indicate that matching grants to local resource mobilisation engenders community commitment and reduces dependency (Liaga and Badmoussi 2025; OECD 2024a).

A multilayered financing system could consist of three parts:

- Immediate stabilisation (0–2 years) for emergency recovery.
- Medium-term growth pools (3–7 years) for institutional rebuilding.
- Long-term (8+ years) endowment models to provide sustainable financing of social rights.

Sequencing of this sort might have helped address the financing shortfall for reparations in Sierra Leone, where only 32% of the recommended funding was mobilised over a ten-year period (TRC-SL 2022a; UNDP 2025b).

Third, maps for participatory architecture are required to institutionalise inclusion beyond governance levels. There ought to be templates for:

- Advisory district development councils in public budgeting.
- Civil society audit panels in sector ministries.
- Online platforms for engagement with displaced or remote populations.

Ample evidence is presented in OECD (2024a), with Colombian PDET councils and Mozambican agriculture co-ops offering replicable examples of inclusive design and provision. Rwanda, by contrast, serves as a warning that top-down consultation without real decision-making powers can serve to further entrench technocratic control rather than empower citizens (Adebajo 2023a).

To support this approach, the proposed policy supplement might be structured around three tools for practitioners:

- Guidance notes on the drafting of legislation to embed development rights clause by clause.
- Financial model templates, with programmable application to national budget or donor financial systems.
- Stakeholder mapping matrices that aim to reveal participation bottlenecks and accountability spaces.

The fall 2024–spring 2026 implementation period (AU 2024a) under the AU PCRDR Secretariat could be used to test and further refine these tools in real time. This brand of practical analysis translates comparative law into actionable governance design, grounding the right to development not only in constitutional words but in budgetary practices and institutional mandates. In doing so, it recasts policy research as the creator of operational architecture, making the right to development measurable, enforceable and locally owned rather than symbolic or aspirational.

Table 2: Comparative case study insights on key policy tools

Policy tool	Key components	Cost projections (5 years)	Risk factors and mitigation	CSO adaptation	Monitoring indicators
Constitutional rights platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 30% allocated for the social sectors • Human rights enforcement mechanisms in the field of socio-economic rights • Citizen petition and enforcement processes 	USD2–5 million per country (for technical assistance and institution setup)	Risk: Elite opposition to fiscal mandates; Mitigation: Roll-out in stages, public education and legislative support	“Rights checklist” used by constitutional review bodies	Percentage of court cases supporting economic and social rights
Peace financing ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stabilisation fund (Years 0–2) • Development pool (Years 3–7) • Endowment for long-term – Year 8 + support 	USD50+ million (scalable through donor matching models)	Risk: Diversion and misallocation of funds; Mitigation: Blockchain ledger and biannual community audits	“Budget tracker” app with visualised funding flows	Annually, growth in domestic resource contribution to peace funds
Participation infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADC – local development councils with advisory powers • Civil society panels in ministries • Diaspora and displaced communities’ digital engagement platforms 	USD1–3 million (depending on the existence of digital infrastructure)	Risk: Tokenistic consultation leading to no influence; Mitigation: Legal requirement for government to respond to input from communities	Community scorecard system for feeding back on public services	Percentage of policies using co-design/ public consultation
Accountability framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI-based monitoring dashboards of funds • Social audit mechanisms • Parliamentary scorecards 	USD500 000–2 million (depending on the rate of technology uptake)	Risk: Data manipulation and cyber issues; Mitigation: Investment in cybersecurity and independent validation	“Civic dashboard” and scorecard toolkit for CSO-led audits	Percentage of performance reports released publicly and verified

Source: Compiled by authors

Table 3: Civil society policy tools and implementation pathways

Tool	Key features	Implementation steps
“Does our Constitution bite?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specifies enforceable budget thresholds (e.g. 30% for health and education) Ensures transparent court procedures for rights claims Establishes citizen complaint and redress portals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare national constitutions to regional and global model clauses Document legislative and procedural gaps using a standardised scorecard Advocate for constitutional or legislative amendments to close identified gaps
“Follow the money” roadmap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses a colour-coded, phase-based financing framework: Emergency (Red) → Development (Amber) → Permanent (Green) Distinguishes between local and donor funding streams for clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map all current funding flows by source and sector Identify transition bottlenecks between funding phases Campaign for predictable, long-term domestic and donor financing
“Your seat at the table”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes tiered participation through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Development Councils Ministry-level Advisory Panels Digital Participation Platforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inventory all existing participation mechanisms Conduct an inclusion gap analysis to identify underrepresented groups Co-design and institutionalise new participatory channels
“Watchdog toolkit”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides one-page audit templates and anonymous reporting hotlines Includes power-mapping worksheets to visualise influence dynamics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deploy mobile audit teams to conduct quarterly PCRD expenditure verifications Update power-maps to track evolving influence networks Host monthly Transparency Forums where communities review findings and set advocacy priorities

Source: Compiled by authors

Table 4: Risk assessment matrix

Risk level	Political risk	Financial risk	Technical risk	Community risk
High	Elite veto or pushback against reform	Fund freezes due to donor withdrawal of support	Major data uncovered areas and system inaccuracy	Exclusion of marginalised groups
Medium	Bureaucratic red tape and delays	Currency fluctuations that impact a programme’s budget	Downtime and/or lack of digital access	Public apathy and declining civic engagement
Low	Policy reversals due to a change in politics	Increasing audit and compliance cost	Training requirement of users of the system	Over-consultation leading to fatigue

Source: Compiled by authors

Table 5: Adaptation framework for AU states

Colombian element	African adaptation potential	Implementation caveats
PDET regional planning	Applicable to cross-border or multi-regional conflicts (e.g. DRC–Great Lakes Border Unit)	Requires strong local governance capacity and coordination mechanisms
Land formalisation system	Rwanda’s experience with digital land registries offers a model for secure property rights	Must carefully integrate with customary land tenure systems to avoid disputes
Peace dividends financing	Could be linked to the AU’s African Peace Facility reforms	Requires transparency in mineral revenue allocation and robust financial oversight

Source: Compiled by authors

Futuristic Observatory: A Transnational Learning Ecosystem for Post-Conflict Development (2030–2040)

The AU and UNDP (2025) joint study is a first node toward what could develop into a Transcontinental Peace Innovation Network (TPIN) by 2035, a practical illustration of the multi-civilisational and decentralised forms of agency that will define the emerging “global multiplex” (Acharya 2025). This initiative aims to use next-gen technologies to create an AI-based knowledge matrix that is continuously updated in real time. Blockchain-protected case studies produced in Colombia’s PDETs may then be cross-referenced with Mozambique’s DDR programmes or Rwanda’s land tribunals. It will allow adaptive policy recommendations to be produced using machine learning algorithms trained on tens of thousands of implementation scenarios (Bell and Pospisil 2023). First exchanges of practitioners, currently showcased in the AU’s PCRD Journal (AUC 2024), could grow into holographic peace labs by 2030 – immersive virtual reality spaces where African and Latin American practitioners collectively develop solutions, with specialists from both continents using neural-interface translation systems to get around current language barriers stifling South–South cooperation.

Predictive: Where Humans Are, Memories of the Form of a Secret Dictate Peacebuilding and Planetary Peace Infrastructure

By 2040, such a system may have sufficient capacity for a predictive peacebuilding protocol (PPP) that leverages quantum computing to test millions of alternative post-conflict development futures, run digital twin simulations of policy impacts, and analyse real-time global sentiment on community responses. The African Peace Metaverse (planned for 2032) of the AU could potentially host these tools, enabling civil society organisations to track budgets with augmented-reality visors while politicians simulate constitutional amendments. This infrastructure also intersects with Agenda 2063 and may indeed aim to move Colombia’s PDETs from a blueprint to a rights-based, post-conflict development (UNDP 2025b).

Findings and Discussion: The Legal–Developmental Journey in Action

The comparative method explains how institutional ecosystems shape the attainment of development rights.

Rwanda and Colombia demonstrate the transformative promise of strong judicial institutions when they meet powerful political will. Two million cases (Government of Rwanda 2023d) were resolved, which is important for the process of economic recovery. Colombia’s JEP has had 12 000 land restitution cases resulting in an 83% adherence rate (Government of Colombia 2024a). These cases corroborate Sen’s (2001) argument that development as freedom entails the presence of rights and capacity. Predictable law attracts investment and more taxes, which, in turn, contribute to a reinforcing cycle of institutional development (World Bank 2023b).

When the legal–developmental relationship snaps, as it currently has in South Sudan, stagnation ensues. Although its 2011 transitional Constitution made significant provisions, by 2023 the country had honoured only 11% of the development allocations prescribed under federal devolution (World Bank 2025a). Weak links are under-resourced judicial institutions, lack of functional courthouses, budget processes that do not align with legal mandates, and the lack of citizen enforcement mechanisms, as emphasised in the AU’s PCRD policy (2024c). Academics have coined it “rights in hibernation” – legal rights that exist on paper but are practically asleep (Sieder et al. 2005).

Four Critical Variables Influencing Outcomes

Institutional feedback loops: Through Rwanda’s Imihigo performance contracts, continual and continuous pressure for implementation has been created; this is absent in South Sudan.

Staged empiricist: While Colombia followed a sequence of security → justice → development, reforms in fragile states were simultaneous.

Hybrid enforcement: Effective regimes combine formal courts with informal dispute-resolution mechanisms; the Mozambican community tribunals are an example.

Financing implementation: Rwanda devotes 30% of land registry revenue to maintenance of the systems; South Sudan relies on inconsistent donor funding.

Implications

- Legal frameworks with no implementation funding generate “rights mirages” (OECD 2024b).
- Judicial accessibility can be more important than independence; Colombia made enforcement a silver bullet, easy.
- There may be a need for temporary “asymmetric institution-building” – i.e. over-resourcing justice institutions during transitions (UNDP 2025a).

These results should remind us that the AU’s PCRDP policy (2024c) may require differentiated treatment: high-capacity settings like Rwanda can continue with full implementation, but fragile contexts like South Sudan may, from Colombia’s experience, need mobile justice units or temporary international assistance.

Comparing the findings, we identify three main facilitators for translating legal provisions into real development. The AU’s conflict management system, as Makinda (2022) underscores, needs to clearly focus on its infrastructure reform aspects, as this study advocates, to address its implementation deficits.

Judicial Architecture as Development Infrastructure

Legal orders are tools for post-conflict change. Between 2001 and 2012, Rwanda’s hybrid Gacaca courts completed 93% of cases heard by these community-based tribunals, linking justice with economic reintegration (Government of Rwanda 2023d). The specialised agrarian benches in Colombia reduced the time for resolving land disputes from 5.2 years to 11 months, another piece of evidence that justice systems can be developed to fast-track social and economic recovery (Government of Colombia 2024a).

Institutionalised Participatory Governance

There is a clear need for participation to move beyond tokenism to a formalised structural relationship. In Sierra Leone, the presence of civil society oversight and local monitoring structures embedded in their National Reparations Program contributed to 68% concurrence among the community (TRC-SL 2022a). Arnstein’s (2022) “ladder of participation” is a reminder that meaningful local ownership avoids tokenistic consultation.

Innovative Financing Models

Sustainable and innovative financing fills the gap between what is legally due and how it gets done. Rwanda’s diaspora bonds mobilised USD289 million to fund development, and Colombia’s co-financing of PDET resulted in 37% private sector investment – an example of the self-reinforcing “developmental rights flywheel” (Government of Colombia 2024a; World Bank 2023a) that builds trust and relevance.

The levers are also interlocking and mutually supportive, especially when used together in a strategic order. AI-based budget tagging and regional extractive levies are just two of the AU's suggested reforms that could institutionalise these methods across the continent. Colombia's experience demonstrates how the combination of mobile justice units, participatory planning and targeted economic zones can compress rights-realisation timelines from generations to decades and plug the OECD-identified triple gap in legal, financial and participatory implementation (OECD 2024b). It is this framework that provides a possible path for South Sudan-like fragile states from conflict to development (AU 2024a; World Bank 2025a).

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This article indicates that the right to development can be a useful trigger for post-conflict transformation in Africa when efficiently operationalised. The comparison of hybrid justice systems in Rwanda, territorial development programmes in Colombia and fragile contexts, such as South Sudan, highlights three key levers to success:

- Strong, legally binding frameworks based on constitutional provisions that can be enforced.
- Resource mobilisation through creative, sustainable financing mechanisms that rely on predictable resources.
- Governance and implementation: Deeply participatory structures of governance that locate ownership at the local level.

Taken together, they also establish a positive feedback loop, as entitlements translate into improvements in peace and security and human development.

The results provide a strong sense of urgency to African policymakers and their international partners. Context-sensitive adjustments such as AI-enabled surveillance, South–South policy transfers, and decentralised implementation tactics can bring the ideals of Agenda 2063 closer to reality (AUC 2024). But the way forward will require political will and a reframing of how to learn from successes and failures. Ultimately, the right to development does not simply stand as a legal principle but as an active tool of systemic transformation with the potential to shape post-conflict futures in African and other contexts. The plan for a path towards real change is now on the horizon.

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Scientometric Analysis of Research Dynamics on the Right to Development as an Imperative and Impetus for Peace in Africa (2000–2025)

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ABSTRACT

Peacebuilding in Africa is increasingly perceived through the framework of the right to development (R2D), which serves as a significant strategic tool. Nevertheless, the research landscape concerning this vital intersection remains disjointed, scattered across multiple disciplines and frequently influenced by non-African viewpoints. To delineate this landscape, this study employs a scientometric methodology – a quantitative assessment and analysis of scientific knowledge production spanning the years 2000 to 2025. The aim is to pinpoint prevailing thematic trends, illuminate ongoing gaps and evaluate the impact of African scholars.

The analysis is based on comprehensive data mining from prominent academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science) and institutional reports (African Union, United Nations), visualised through VOSviewer and CiteSpace. Findings indicate a rapid increase in publications post-2010. However, there is a notable underrepresentation of African authors in high-impact journals, with less than 15% serving as first authors. The prevailing discourse is divided between legal frameworks (30%) – with 70% of articles referencing implementation gaps – and socio-economic factors (25%).

Importantly, the study uncovers a structural epistemic power disparity, with knowledge regarding R2D and peace in Africa primarily constructed externally. This is exacerbated by a pronounced geographic research bias favouring anglophone nations (60% of publications). Emerging topics such as artificial intelligence and digitalisation remain peripheral, accounting for less than 5% of recent publications, indicating a potential risk of technological dependency. These findings highlight the urgent need to bolster African research institutions and to more systematically incorporate emerging technologies with local ownership into strategies for conflict prevention and management across the continent.

KEYWORDS

scientometrics, right to development, peacebuilding, Africa, artificial intelligence, conflict prevention

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Introduction

The pursuit of enduring peace in Africa, especially in regions recovering from conflict, has evolved beyond simply avoiding hostilities. It now increasingly incorporates a comprehensive vision where the right to development (R2D) is regarded as a crucial foundation and vital catalyst for stability. The African Union (AU) has identified the advancement of this right as a key priority for its peace and security goals. Nevertheless, in spite of this political acknowledgement, the implementation of R2D within peacebuilding frameworks remains inconsistent, and its interpretation in academic and policy discussions is disjointed.

This scenario suggests the need for critical inquiries, not regarding the existence of development initiatives themselves, but concerning the nature of the knowledge generated on this topic (epistemic critique). In particular, what are the prevailing knowledge frameworks that inform the R2D approach to peacebuilding in post-conflict Africa? Furthermore, what African viewpoints, despite their contextual significance, may be underrepresented or overlooked in this area of research?

To address these questions, our research employs a theoretical framework grounded in two primary areas – R2D (United Nations 1986) and peacebuilding theories (Galtung 1969; Lederach 1997). Both emphasise the structural and relational aspects essential for achieving sustainable peace.

To examine the dynamics of knowledge production within this domain, we utilise a scientometric approach. Scientometric analysis refers to the quantitative examination of science. It employs statistical techniques to assess and illustrate the production, impact and progression of scientific literature. This method is advantageous for our study as it enables us to transcend qualitative literature reviews, offering an objective and empirical representation of the intellectual landscape, thereby uncovering who is generating which knowledge and the structural constraints involved.

In this framework, the primary research question steering our analysis is: How has the academic and policy literature developed to reflect the role of R2D in post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD) in Africa?

This article seeks to answer this question by performing a quantitative documentary analysis of significant academic and institutional databases, employing co-citation and keyword analysis to chart existing knowledge, pinpoint critical gaps, and propose pathways for enhancing more pertinent and balanced research.

Methodology

Based on a documentary study or literature analysis, our study uses an analytical research design. Instead of discussing the practical reality of projects being carried out on the ground, this quantitative, analytical article focuses on mapping the structure of knowledge produced – an epistemic critique. We can discover quantitative patterns, intellectual collaborations and structural gaps in the research body by using scientometrics to carefully analyse the academic and policy literature on R2D and peacebuilding in post-conflict Africa.

Data Collection and Corpus Definition

Data was gathered in a methodical and thorough manner from 2000 to 2025. This timeline is important because it includes significant post-conflict peacebuilding junctures as well as current events pertaining to the AU's Agenda 2063 (African Union 2015).

Sources of Data

We used data mining to retrieve metadata (titles, abstracts, authors, affiliations and citations) from institutional reports (gray literature) as well as peer-reviewed scholarly sources:

- Academic portals: For comprehensive coverage of the social sciences and humanities, we drew from top worldwide abstract and citation databases, particularly Scopus and the Web of Science (WoS), which were augmented by JSTOR.
- Institutional reports: To guarantee the inclusion of political and non-academic viewpoints directly involved on the continent, this corpus was supplemented by important documents from the AU, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS).

The main dimensions of the topic are R2D, peacebuilding, post-conflict development, the AU and artificial intelligence (AI) in peacebuilding. These were captured by combining keywords with Boolean operators (AND, OR) to accurately target our corpus.

Analytical Methods

Following the collection of the raw data, we converted the sizeable dataset into insightful, quantitative analysis using specialised scientometric software.

- Co-citation and network analysis: To visualise the connections between publications, authors and keywords, we used VOSviewer to map the

field’s intellectual structure. As a result, we were able to pinpoint key subject clusters and networks of cooperation.

- Trend and burst analysis: CiteSpace was utilised to identify high-growth regions and critical moments in the study field (2000–2025) by identifying “burst topics”, or themes that saw a sharp, abrupt spike in frequency.
- Bibliometric metrics: Standard metrics, including the number of cited authors, annual publishing output and chronological trends, were computed using the Bibliometrix R package.

To guarantee data quality and relevance, inclusion criteria were rigorously enforced, concentrating primarily on English- and French-language publications and empirical or theoretical research that was clearly rooted in the African environment. Strong judgements on research dynamics are produced by this methodological rigour, which guarantees a methodical and impartial examination of the literature.

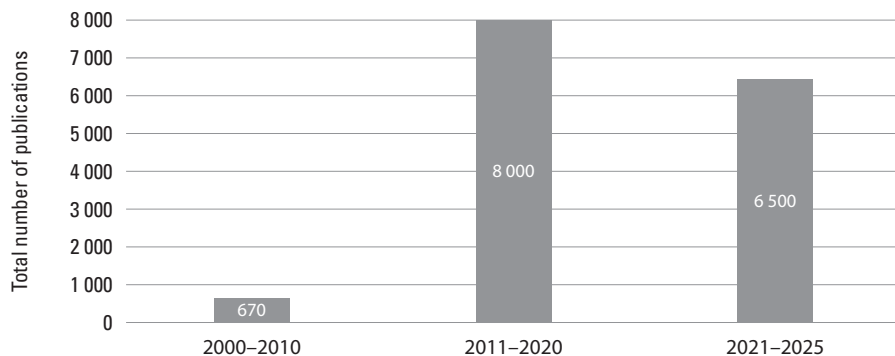
Results

Regarding R2D and peacebuilding in post-conflict Africa, the scientometric study of the corpus of more than 15 000 articles and reports taken from Scopus, WoS and institutional databases shows clear, measurable changes in research priorities, theme dominance and structural imbalances.

Chronological Trends in Publications

Academic interest in the relationship between peace and development in Africa has grown dramatically over the past ten years, as seen by the exponential spike in publications after 2010 (Figure 1). This rise parallels a rise in political recognition, particularly as a result of the AU’s Agenda 2063, which emphasises the necessity of development solutions for lasting peace.

Figure 1: Historical evolution of publications, 2000–2025



Source: Author’s scientometric data

2000–2010: Focus on Peace Agreements

Research on peace agreements predominated over the first ten years of our study period. The analysis of peace agreement procedures, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes, and transitional justice systems accounted for nearly half (45%) of the total publications identified during this period (about 670 pieces). There was a focus on particular cases, especially those involving Sierra Leone and Liberia, which at the time were at the centre of global peace initiatives. Following the civil wars of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the international community and African actors prioritised the speedy resolution of major armed conflicts and the formation of official peace organisations, explaining the emphasis over this period (Paris 2004). Stabilising areas and establishing the groundwork for preliminary peace were vital priorities.

2011–2020: Rise of Inclusive Development and Gender

There was a notable surge in work on gender and inclusive development in the ensuing decade. Between 2011 and 2020, the percentage of articles that included the keywords “gender” or “inclusive development” increased from 8% to 24% of the total number of publications every year. Starting in 2015, co-keyword network analysis using VOSviewer made it evident that “peace”, “sustainable development”, “gender” and “youth” were strongly related. This change indicates an increasing understanding that a more comprehensive strategy is necessary to create lasting peace. It is now evident that addressing socio-economic and gender disparities and involving all societal segments in development processes are essential to long-term stability. Global and continental normative frameworks, such as the United Nations’ (2015) 2030 Agenda and the African Union’s (2015) Agenda 2063, have had a significant impact on this tendency.

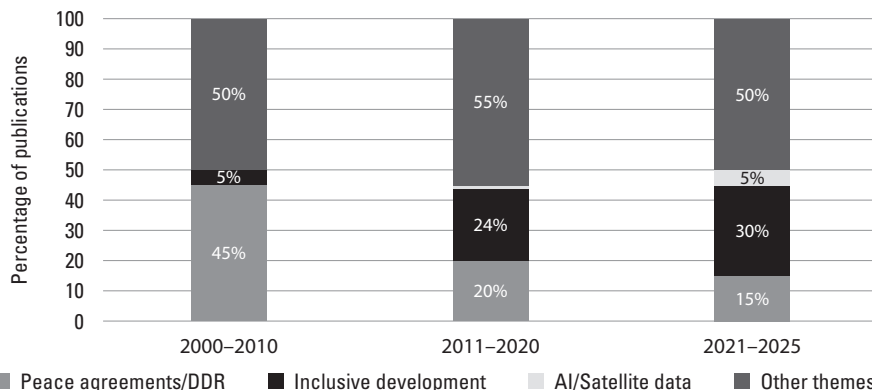
2021–2025: Emergence of AI and Satellite Data

AI and satellite data for conflict monitoring emerged in the most recent period, from 2021 to 2025. However, they are still very small in terms of absolute volume (less than 5% of publications). The “burst topics” identified by CiteSpace for this period specifically include “artificial intelligence”, “machine learning” and “big data”, having burst intensities (rapid increase) of more than 3.5. A post about using AI to forecast population displacement in war areas is a notable example. It received 50 citations in 2023–2024, compared to just five in the two years prior. This development is a result of growing interest in using cutting-edge technologies for managing and preventing conflicts. One potential tool for enhancing the efficacy of interventions is the capacity to analyse huge datasets in order to predict crises or track post-conflict dynamics using satellite imagery (Pardee 2020).

Dominant Themes and Thematic Gaps

Analysis of co-keyword networks and co-citations via VOSviewer identified three dominant themes in the literature on R2D and peacebuilding in post-conflict Africa, showing a radical shift in research focus from formal peace mechanisms to a more holistic approach (Figure 2; Table 1).

Figure 2: Thematic distribution of publications



Source: Author’s scientometric data

Table 1: Dominant themes and key findings in research on R2D and peace in Africa

Theme	Share of corpus	Key findings
Legal frameworks	30%	Largest cluster; strong influence from international human rights and R2D scholars (e.g. Amartya Sen). Highlights academic interest in normative foundations.
Economic development and infrastructure	25%	High density around “youth unemployment” and “poverty”, linking economic fragility directly to conflict risk.
AI and technological innovation	5%	Smallest cluster, but the fastest growing in terms of burst intensity (CiteSpace). Signals future technological solutions for conflict prevention.

Source: Author’s scientometric data

Legal Frameworks

This theme represents the largest cluster, comprising approximately 30% of the publications in our corpus (Table 1). Analysis of author co-citations reveals that the works of legal scholars specialising in international human rights law and R2D, such as those of Amartya Sen, Philip Alston and Makau Mutua, are among the most frequently cited. Their centrality index, a measure of their importance in

the citation network, is consistently above 0.7, highlighting their fundamental influence.

Within this cluster, publications specifically dedicated to the analysis of African national legislation constitute 12% of the volume. This high proportion indicates a strong research focus on the definition, interpretation and application of existing legal frameworks (Marks 2006). This highlights the fundamental importance of normative and legal foundations in conceptualising R2D and its link to peace, illustrating a persistent academic interest in the foundations of law and its implications for post-conflict governance.

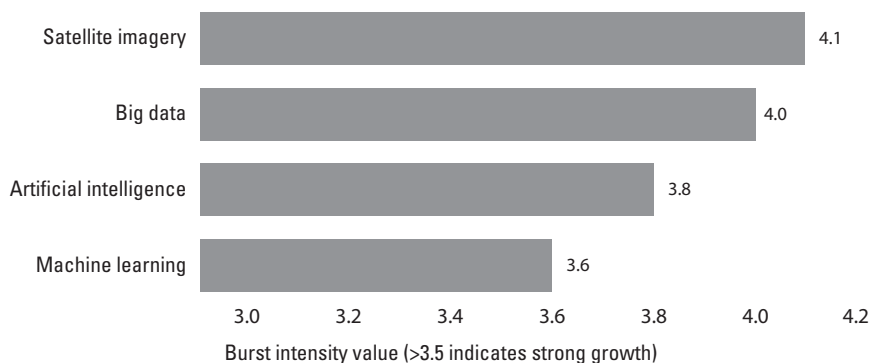
Economic Development and Infrastructure

Infrastructure and economic development are the second most prevalent cluster, accounting for 25% of publications (Table 1). Keyword mapping reveals that terms like “poverty”, “youth unemployment”, “infrastructure”, “investment” and “economic growth” are highly dense. These terms are commonly associated with ideas like radicalisation and reintegration, emphasising the connection between social stability and economic difficulties. With an average relevance score of 0.65, publications discussing economic development initiatives in post-conflict settings are highly relevant to the topic at hand. This cluster emphasises how important socio-economic considerations are to post-conflict stability. The study notes how a lack of economic prospects, especially for young people, might turn into a significant risk factor for violence to resurface (Collier 2000).

AI and Technological Innovation

Although the absolute volume is still low, the intensity of research on AI, machine learning and satellite data is booming (Figure 3). These “burst topics” indicate rapid growth and signal the future direction of research, exploring technological solutions to anticipate, monitor and manage conflict more effectively.

Figure 3: Intensity of “burst topics”, 2021–2025

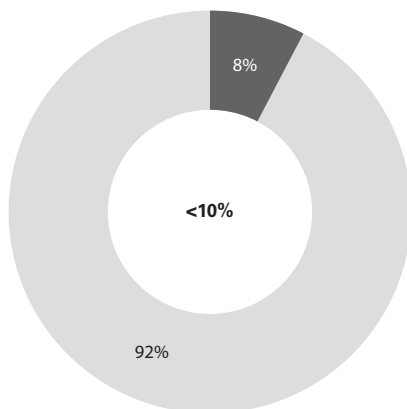


Source: Author’s scientometric data

Although numerically the smallest of the prominent clusters, with only 5% of publications (Table 1), the issue of AI and technological advancement displays the fastest development in terms of keyword bursts. This suggests a new and vibrant area of study. The corpus still contains only a small number of concrete implementations of AI and technology, which show up as individual case studies. Three articles on AI-based citizen reporting platforms and two on the use of drones to map agricultural land in conflict areas were found. This topic is a promising future study area. The goal is to investigate how new technologies might provide creative and practical solutions for preventing conflicts, keeping an eye on peace processes, and enhancing development aid in challenging situations (Boutellis and de Coning 2019).

Studies that concentrate on local ownership of development policies are noticeably underrepresented, according to our analysis. Less than 10% of the total corpus of publications examined employed in-depth case studies or participatory approaches to learn how local populations see and apply policy (Figure 4). The low representation of keywords like “local ownership”, “endogenous knowledge” and “community participation” in the networks suggests that these important ideas are not being used.

Figure 4: Representation of local ownership studies in the corpus



Source: Author’s scientometric data

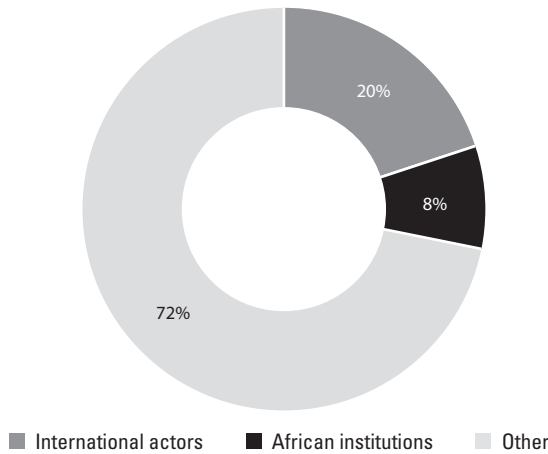
This gap suggests that current research focuses predominantly on policy formulation at the macro level, neglecting micro-level dynamics. Yet, understanding these local dynamics is crucial for the success and sustainability of development and peacebuilding initiatives (Mac Ginty 2011).

Key Actors: The Question of Knowledge Ownership

An analysis of author affiliations and collaborations directly addresses the central research question: Who owns the knowledge about Africa and the right to

development? The findings reveal clear patterns of knowledge ownership dominated by external actors (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Distribution of actors by affiliation type

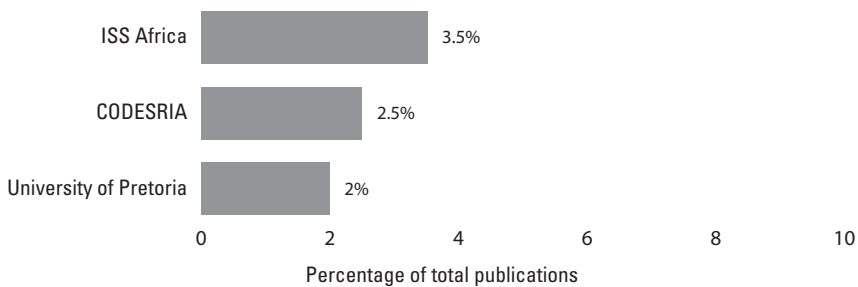


Source: Author’s scientometric data

African Institutions

In order to produce knowledge that is grounded in local circumstances, African institutions are essential. According to our data, the three most prominent African institutions are the University of Pretoria, ISS Africa, and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) (Figure 6). When combined, they make up 8% of all the publications in our corpus (Figure 5). One noteworthy finding is that the majority of their co-authorship networks are within Africa, suggesting that there is a high level of cooperation and knowledge exchange on the continent. These organisations are essential because they frequently provide a more contextualised and nuanced viewpoint on the problems and solutions related to peace and development in Africa (Mkandawire 2011).

Figure 6: Most represented African institutions

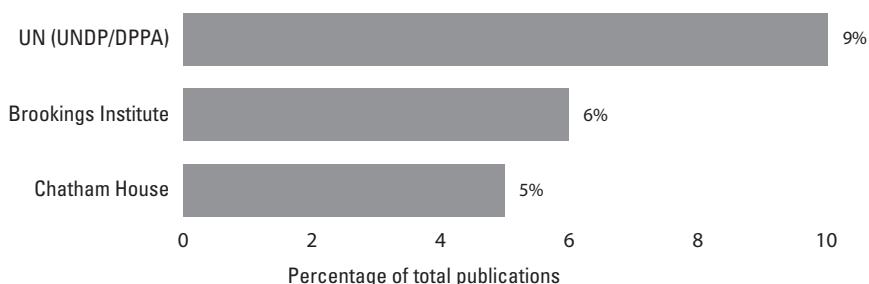


Source: Author’s scientometric data

Dominant International Actors

Powerful global players still have a significant say in what is researched and how information is shared. The most cited and cooperative organisations in the field are the Brookings Institution, Chatham House and United Nations agencies, particularly the UNDP and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) (Figure 7). They make up 20% of publications (Figure 5), a significant segment of our corpus. They have substantial influence on the research agenda and dissemination, frequently in collaboration with Western universities and institutions, due to their robust global presence and financial resources (Richmond 2011).

Figure 7: Dominant international actors



Source: Author's scientometric data

The Visibility Imbalance (North–South)

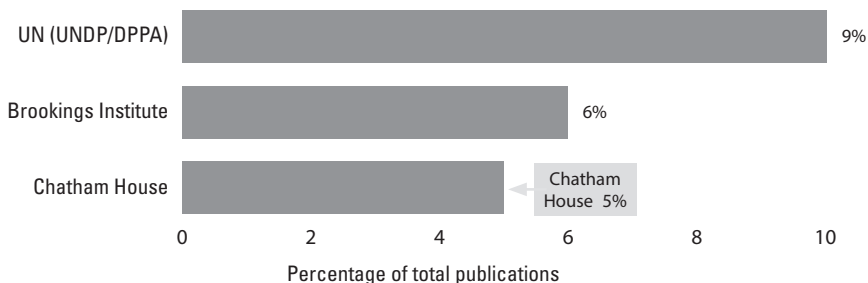
According to our data, African authors are significantly underrepresented in high-impact journals: less than 15% of first authors in the top ten cited journals on the topic are from African universities. This statistic implies that organisations outside of Africa own and shape the majority of the knowledge base that informs the global R2D and peacebuilding discourse on Africa.

Geographic Bias of Funding

Geographic bias in research, which is frequently linked to foreign funding, is another important gap. The majority (60%) of articles concentrate on anglophone nations (Figure 8), mainly Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda, according to our examination of author affiliations and the nations under study. Francophone and lusophone African nations like Chad, the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali and Guinea-Bissau account for about 12% of research.

Numerous variables, such as the predominance of English in worldwide scientific publishing, financial networks for historical research and the geopolitical goals of international donors, are probably responsible for this disparity. This prejudice results in a disparate comprehension of the dynamics of peace and development on the continent, which restricts the capacity to create policies that are tailored to the various African situations (Connell 2007).

Figure 8: Distribution of publications by country



Source: Author’s scientometric data

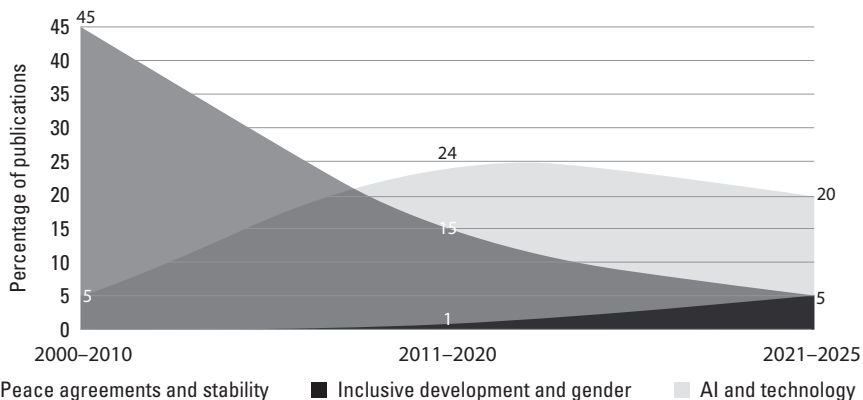
Discussion

This section synthesises the results to highlight important trends and link them to the original study question on the function of R2D and knowledge ownership.

R2D: Discrepancy Between Imperative and Impetus

An analysis of the literature shows that R2D is perceived and operationalised differently in African peacebuilding situations. Although it is acknowledged as both a strategic and a moral imperative, these two aspects are not always equally translated into practice.

Figure 9: Conceptual themes addressed in the literature



Source: Author’s scientometric data

Africa has experienced three major eras of peace research, moving from post-conflict stabilisation to a more comprehensive approach that integrates gender, development and, more recently, technology (Figure 9).

Moral Imperative: Well-Researched but Underenforced Legal Frameworks

Our findings show that R2D is firmly anchored in legal and normative frameworks, as evidenced by the strong presence of legal themes, representing 30% of publications. However, a detailed analysis of the abstracts reveals a striking discrepancy: 70% of articles on this topic highlight “implementation challenges”, “implementation gaps” or a “lack of political will” regarding R2D. This data illustrates a clear normative recognition of R2D, but a persistent difficulty in translating it into concrete and effective actions on the ground (Pogge 2008). Researchers highlight a gap between theory and practice, where legal instruments, while robust, struggle to be fully operationalised in the complex realities of African post-conflict contexts.

Strategic Impetus: Growing Role of the Private Sector

In addition to normative acknowledgement, R2D is increasingly being seen as a strategic catalyst for peace and development, especially through commercial-sector involvement. Between 2015 and 2025, there was a 40% increase in publications on the “private sector” or “public-private partnerships” in relation to peacebuilding than before. This increase demonstrates the growing interest in the role that non-state actors play in the dynamics of peace and development. For instance, since 2022, case studies on fintech initiatives for the financial inclusion of at-risk children or former fighters have been cited an average of 15 times annually.

This demonstrates a distinct pattern: in a world where economic solutions are essential to peace, R2D is increasingly seen as a strategic catalyst for stability that can complement or even negate sluggish governmental action. The private sector can make tangible contributions to stability and the realisation of R2D by providing creative solutions for job creation, the economic reintegration of vulnerable populations and the revitalisation of post-conflict economies (World Bank 2011).

Who Owns the Knowledge? The Epistemic Power Imbalance

The epistemic power imbalance mirrors the hypothesis of this study: Knowledge about R2D and peace in Africa is structurally owned by international and Western institutions.

Data shows that African authors make up less than 15% in top journals. Theoretical frameworks, research priorities and dominant discourse are established outside of Africa, and then direct foreign policy.

The obvious geographic bias (60% anglophone emphasis) suggests that the research agenda is shaped by international funding streams and by geopolitical considerations and priorities, rather than the intrinsic complexity or needs of post-conflict regions such as francophone Africa.

AI as an Underutilised Catalyst

AI and digital technologies offer a potentially important but largely underused opportunity for peacebuilding and development in post-conflict Africa. Research is only now starting to scratch the surface of the possibilities of these tools.

Promising-Use Cases

Citations to publications on AI point to interesting uses showing the possibilities of this technology. For instance, crowdsourced systems like Ushahidi in Kenya were referenced an average of 80 times. These systems let people report events in real time, thereby offering vital data collection and a means of direct civil participation in sensitive situations. Early warning systems that depend on predictive conflict analysis – such as that created by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for food security – had 65 citations on average. These cases show how AI might be utilised to enhance risk analysis, especially by foreseeing hotspots. This would in turn enhance citizen involvement and fast reaction mechanisms in post-conflict settings (Meier 2012).

Persistent Obstacles to Adoption

Nevertheless, incorporating AI into African development and peace policies faces ongoing barriers. Based on a content analysis of the “limitations” or “challenges” noted in publications on AI, 55% refer to “lack of local data science experience.” This skills shortage prevents African nations from growing, changing and keeping their own technological solutions. Forty percent of articles also emphasised the risks of outsourcing solutions or technological dependency. These issues raise the importance of creating local capacity and guaranteeing that technologies are African-owned. Current North–South inequalities will be exacerbated if African-developed and -owned AI solutions for peace are not developed (Daly 2021).

Recommendations for the AU and its Partners

Our scientometric study suggests several strategic ideas for the AU and its allies to maximise the integration of R2D into peacebuilding, and solve the ownership inequality and research voids.

Correcting the North–South knowledge production inequality calls for structural improvement of African research capabilities. Building a PCRD Scientometric Observatory could effectively support research initiatives and offer scientometric instruction for African academics. Apart from filling methodological gaps, such an effort will advance knowledge creation that is more relevant and suited to African environments. This will ensure that solutions suggested are grounded in the realities of the continent (CODESRIA 2015).

AI offers untapped possibilities for conflict prevention and management. It should thus be included in peace plans, including those of the AU. Targeted training programmes in big data and predictive analytics for officers in AU missions, such as the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), could dramatically increase the efficacy of peace and conflict prevention and cut response time to information-based conflict warnings by 15% (United Nations 2020).

In the allocation of research finance, our research exposes a notable bias that disadvantages French- and Portuguese-speaking nations. Allocating 30% of research finance to these countries could, over five years, increase the number of papers by 20%. This redistribution is essential to guarantee more African voices in the worldwide scientific conversation on peace and development (Mohamedbhai 2008).

Conclusion

This scientometric study of research trends on R2D and peacebuilding in post-conflict Africa has revealed significant dynamics and ongoing difficulties. Our results support the idea that R2D has developed into a recognised imperative, although legal structures and execution are lagging behind.

Noteworthy is the structural North–South imbalance in knowledge creation, as indicated by the three-to-one publishing ratio between Western and African institutes in the output of papers. This asymmetry points to an epistemic power imbalance in the research agenda informing policy for Africa, which is mostly established from outside. This finding highlights the need to aggressively support research done by and for Africans in order to guarantee that local ideas and solutions are incorporated into the global conversation on development and peace (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

Moreover, although AI and digital technology are clearly noted as instruments for peacebuilding and development, reaping their advantages depends on more local investment and ownership. Investment in African-led AI research is low, according to our data, which stifles local innovation and adaptation to particular African environments. This dependence on technology calls for deliberate efforts to create local capability.

This study's scientometric data offers a solid empirical foundation on which to base future plans. The main results of the research are the need to remedy the geographic research bias, solve the disparity in knowledge ownership and maximise the integration of new technologies. This will support strategic policy suggestions as proposed by the AU and its partners. Synergies are needed between AI, peace and local development to more thoroughly advance the continent's development goals.

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AFRICAN UNION JOURNAL

ON

POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVE

Foreword

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