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PSC Interview: Pursuing the Agenda 2063 dream
First Saudi-Africa summit: off to a rocky start?

On 10 November, the maiden Saudi Arabia-Africa summit was hosted in Riyadh – the latest in a growing list of ‘Africa+1’ summits. The gathering presented an opportunity to strengthen relations between Saudi Arabia and African states, and bolster economic and diplomatic ties.

Among the over 50 leaders who attended were the presidents of Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe. African Union (AU) Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat and AU Chairperson, Comoran President Azali Assoumani, were also there.

The summit underscores the Kingdom’s vision of integrating Africa into its multipolar foreign policy and trade agenda.

It was notable that Saudi Arabia invited suspended AU member states – such as Gabon, Niger and Sudan – to the summit. Although the focus was on African countries and not the AU, the decision could undermine the AU’s norms and principles among its members – a trend already evident in the recent rise in coups. It could also strain Saudi-AU relations. As it is, the AU-Arab League summit planned for 11 November was cancelled due to disagreements among African states about the Sahrawi Republic’s attendance.

The summit – the first Arab-African gathering since Kuwait hosted one in 2013 – underscores Saudi Arabia’s vision of integrating Africa into its
multipolar foreign policy and trade agenda. The country also seeks to
demonstrate global leadership by fostering stronger ties between the Arab
world and Africa.

The meeting comes at a time of greater African membership in various global
institutions. In August, BRICS expanded to include Saudi Arabia and two
African nations – Egypt (representing Africa and the Arab world) and Ethiopia
(headquarters of the AU) from January 2024. That same month, the AU was
admitted to the G20.

With African states and the AU becoming increasingly important in world
politics, Saudi Arabia plans to increase its diplomatic presence on the
continent by opening more embassies and scaling up its limited economic
investments. It predominantly trades with Egypt and South Africa. Most
exports are rubber, chemicals, consumer goods, minerals, metals and food
products. Meanwhile, metals, raw materials, vegetable, stone and glass
products account for the largest share of imports.

Investment pledges of over US$25 billion by 2030, and Crown Prince
Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud proposed allocating US$10 billion to support
Saudi exports. During the same period, the Saudi Fund for Development
would provide US$5 billion in development funding to African countries. Saudi
Arabia’s Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan announced the signing of
contracts totalling US$533 million to help Ghana and other African nations
with debt relief. Over 50 other agreements were signed in various sectors.

Saudi Arabia’s diplomatic outreach to juntas at the summit
didn’t lend confidence in its belief of Africa’s quest for
good governance and stability

The summit also allowed African leaders to step up their role in crisis
diplomacy. The meeting’s Riyadh Declaration condemned Israel’s
international law violations, called for a halt to military operations in occupied
Palestine, and for civilians to be protected. South Africa, Egypt and Ethiopia
could use their position in BRICS to urge other members, including Saudi
Arabia, to play a more constructive role in ending the Russia-Ukraine war.

Developments in the Middle East indicate that Saudi Arabia could be another
essential security partner for some African states. Already Riyadh has, with
the United States, been leading diplomatic efforts to end Sudan’s war. And
after the Chinese-brokered rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia,
Iran is seeking to normalise diplomatic relations with Egypt. Any detente
between Tehran and Cairo could spur normalisation of hostile relations
between Egypt and Ethiopia.

However, Saudi Arabia’s diplomatic outreach to military juntas at the summit
didn’t lend confidence in Africa’s quest for good governance and stability.
The presence of leaders from countries suspended from the AU for staging
coups was significant. In barring them from ‘all its activities,’ the AU Peace

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Current PSC Chairperson
HE Abdi Mahamoud Eybe,
Djibouti’s Ambassador to Ethiopia
and Permanent Representative to
the African Union.

PSC members
Burundi, Cameroon,
Republic of Congo, Djibouti,
The Gambia, Ghana, Morocco,
Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal,
South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia,
Uganda, Zimbabwe
and Security Council (PSC) strongly rejected ‘any external interference by any actor or any country outside the continent in the peace and security affairs in Africa.’

By inviting them, Saudi Arabia legitimised these leaders and disregarded the AU’s anti-coup principles, weakening the impact of AU sanctions. Discussions at the summit with Gabon’s Interim President Brice Oligui Nguema about lifting global sanctions, and the African Development Bank’s lifting of financial sanctions against Nguema during his visit to Riyadh, directly undermined sanctions regimes. Russia’s hosting of suspended military juntas at the July Russia-Africa summit similarly contradicts its commitment to security cooperation with Africa.

Both Saudi Arabia and Russia are BRICS members. The group’s leaders share a belief that Western states and institutions dominate the international system and don’t serve developing nations’ interests. But Saudi Arabia and Russia’s interactions with African states suspended by the AU cast doubts over their commitment to acting in Africa’s interests. It also raises questions about the value of Africa+1 summits for the continent.

Saudi Arabia legitimised coup-leaders and disregarded the AU’s anti-coup principles, weakening the impact of its sanctions

Saudi Arabia can engage sovereign states as it pleases within international law. However, international cooperation requires that the pursuit of national interests recognises shared goals among partners. The refusal of various African leaders to appear in the official Russia-Africa summit photo alongside those from Burkina Faso and Mali sends a clear message on the need to respect AU decisions and principles. This symbolic gesture should be extended to urging Africa’s partners to recognise its anti-coup norms.

Summits that engage the AU and its member states should pursue national and common interests based on mutual respect, solidarity and accountability – especially now that the AU has joined the G20 as a permanent member.

While AU suspensions don’t bar states from participating in Africa+1 summits, sanctions imposed by the PSC must be strengthened. As the AU’s decision-making organ on security, the PSC could discuss measures to better deter or punish coup behaviour. Perhaps the ‘suspension from all AU activities’ could include summits with external partners seeking to engage with the continental body and its member states.

Finalising the AU partnership strategy is an opportunity to add measures that reinforce sanctions. The strategy should call on partners to respect AU decisions and principles, and recommend that suspended member states not be invited to Africa+1 summits. This is vital to becoming a respectable and influential player and partner on the international stage.
Strengthening the outcomes of Oran

From 17 to 18 December, the AU’s PSC will host the Oran seminar on peace and security in Africa. This 10th annual edition will bring together the 15 members of the PSC, the African members (A3) of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), partners and ‘friends of the seminar’. The last-mentioned are states or entities wishing to support the process. Delegates will discuss continental concerns under the theme ‘Enhancing cooperation between the PSC and A3’.

Initiated in 2013, the seminar seeks greater collaboration and cooperation between the PSC and A3 in promoting African peace, security and development. In addition to capacitating incoming African members, it is a reflection platform. Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia and Niger participated in the 2022 event as ‘friends’, while Chad was invited as a guest. The PSC may invite member states to join. However, the distinction between friends and guests remains unclear.

Over the last decade, the Council has institutionalised the seminar as a statutory annual meeting. This offers it and the A3 a platform for regular consultations, crucial for formalising the collaboration and cooperation enshrined in the first conclusions of the seminar. However, despite its stature and advantages, the initiative has achieved mixed results and must address numerous challenges if its purpose is to be achieved.

Achievements

The nine seminars since 2013 have shared similar objectives and formats, involving the PSC and A3 on one hand and the UN and friends of the seminar on the other. Given the confusion this may cause about the seminar’s ownership, nature and objectives, there’s doubt that it has achieved its initial goal, namely to ensure an African common position at the UNSC.

At the outset, the seminar identified 20 issues and challenges of coordination, information and analysis, and human and financial capacity. The conclusions of the last event, held in December 2022, indicate commendable progress in addressing the three categories.

A draft manual on engagements and coordination between the PSC and African UNSC members was developed and submitted to member states for input. The consolidated draft will be resubmitted to the Council for adoption ‘as soon as possible’. Although the timing may indicate ongoing negotiations on the text that might further delay its adoption, a draft is considered progress in formalising PSC and A3 collaboration.

The meeting commended the AU permanent observer mission to the UN for its pivotal secretariat and repository role in preserving A3 institutional memory. The role focuses on the pen-holding and inadequate coordination channels identified 10 years ago.

A draft manual on engagements and coordination was developed but has not yet been adopted

The decade has produced five tangible results, including include the draft manual, AU observer mission designation as A3 secretariat and repository and the troika. There is also the African diplomatic caucus in New York and a platform for permanent engagements with A3 embassies in Addis Ababa.

Challenges

However, several persisting and emerging challenges continue to limit the seminar’s impact and hamper coordination. Even though the draft manual is commendable, it remains a draft with no binding power and no indication of when it will be adopted. Adopting it during the upcoming seminar is essential to consolidate PSC and A3 collaboration. However, almost a decade of seminars and no adopted manual raises questions about the political will of both parties.

Progress in conveying a single, coordinated message to the UNSC on Africa’s peace and security concerns is commendable, but using the A3 as a channel has challenges. The political nature and role of the group of three African UNSC members is yet to be clarified against the seminar’s objectives. It remains unclear whether the rationale is to use the A3 as an extension of the AU. Achieving such an objective would be daunting for several reasons.

Reaching an African common position has proved complicated since African leaders committed to it in

In Africa’s quest for UN-assessed contributions to support AU peace support operations, A3 members such as Côte d’Ivoire acted against the AU-A3 agreement, pushing for a UN resolution that did not reflect African views. This was done during its UNSC tenure from 2018 to 2019. Although such behaviour might be seen as isolated, it showcases the fragility of the PSC-A3 agreement, subject to member states’ shifting interests.

Given the goal of African common positions, participation should be limited to African actors

The continuous commitment of A3 members to support and convey the African position has been noticeable over the last five years. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, in his statement closing the last seminar, lauded Kenya for its exemplary and effective representation of Africa at the UNSC while an A3 member. He also mentioned the exemplary PSC-A3 collaboration during negotiations for the joint communiqué of the 16th annual joint consultative meeting with the UNSC led by Gabon and Morocco in 2022.

This might indicate A3 members’ growing eagerness to support the AU’s UNSC agenda, requiring them to report to the former on their UNSC activities, as in the first conclusions of the seminar.

However, despite being part of the AU, A3 members are on the UNSC as sovereign states and are accountable only to their capitals, not the AU. Thus, the organisation’s call for the countries to report back on their UNSC activities is diplomatic heresy based purely on an assumption of a moral pan-African obligation rather than a codified responsibility.

The challenge of limited funding and capacity of state missions and the AU observer mission was underlined by the conclusions of the last seminar. Although Nigeria and Morocco have been commended for deploying support staff to the AU observer mission at their own cost, this is neither viable nor sustainable in the long run.

Another contentious issue is the potential participation of Gabon, a suspended member of the AU and part of the A3. Article 23 of the AU Constitutive Act and the 2009 Ezulwini framework decree that suspended states shall not participate in AU activities. Mali, despite being suspended from the AU, was allowed to attend the previous Oran in 2022. Thus, Gabon, a suspended country, may well attend the upcoming meeting.

Yet concerns remain about Gabon’s participation in closed sessions of the A3, partners and friends, which would further dilute the AU’s norms and principles. In either case, allowing or denying Gabon’s participation in these sessions would set a precedent. It would send a strong signal, as Gabon is the first A3 member affected by a coup and suspended by the AU since the seminar’s inception. An alternative to Gabon’s participation would be inviting incoming A3 members, Algeria and Sierra Leone.

The way forward

For Oran, the meeting should be thoroughly conceptualised and participation limited to African actors, given its goal to foster frank discussions to enhance coordination and collaboration in conveying African common positions. To achieve this, the AU and A3 need to own the seminar financially and politically and ensure total control of participation and agenda-setting.

Coordination could also be strengthened by continuous capacitation of AU missions in centres such as New York, Brussels and Addis Ababa. Since a knowledge gap in PSC and UNSC working methods initiated the seminar, continuous upskilling would fill the void. Training could be provided by African security and peace think tanks, which would minimise seminar discussions on training, freeing time for more crucial topics.

In the spirit of the continental zero tolerance to coups policy, the PSC should insist that Gabon shouldn’t be admitted to closed sessions. This would signify the Council’s commitment to and consistency in implementing democratic norms. It would set a precedent for the treatment of defaulting African states sitting on the UNSC.
Is South Sudan ready for peaceful elections?

In August 2022, South Sudan’s transitional unity government extended its term for two years to February 2025, with an election planned in December 2024. This was to allow stakeholders to address challenges in the implementation of pending provisions of the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS).

The agreement aimed to end the transitional government with an election initially planned for December 2022. However, due to implementation delays, the election was pushed initially to 2023 and now to 2024.

Delayed milestones

Since the 2018 accord signing, implementation of each milestone has been delayed. The formation of the transitional unity government based on chapter one took place in 2020, more than six months later than scheduled. Unification and deployment of 83,000 force members were to happen within eight months of the signing. However, disagreement over ratios and rankings and lack of resources saw the trained unified force’s first graduation taking place only in August 2022.

Despite the government’s statement on the first deployment in October 2023, the security arrangement under chapter two of the agreement faces ongoing defections. These compromise trust in the security forces through non-implementation of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes. Lack of resources and inadequate skill/professionalism of trained forces also threaten the country’s security arrangement.

Similarly, provisions outlined in the peace agreement, such as humanitarian assistance and reconstruction, financial/resource management and transitional justice, are poorly implemented. Due to delays in implementing almost all chapters of R-ARCSS, the peace process has already seen two extensions with adverse consequences for South Sudan’s transition. The current extension provides a roadmap for pending provisions of the agreement crucial for an election to end the transition peacefully and democratically in December 2024.

Disputed election risk

A year until the election, requirements such as improved security arrangements, electoral frameworks and capacitating institutions have not been achieved. Some crucial steps to facilitate these milestones were taken only in November, including reconstituting the National Constitutional Review Commission, National Elections Commission (NEC) and Political Parties Council (PPC). Making these institutions operational requires time. For example, establishing the permanent constitution will need consultations to resolve differences among polarised elite and political parties, which are time- and resource heavy.

Division of electoral responsibility is shared by the NEC – driving civic and voter education – and the PPC – taking care of registration and regulation.
of political party activity. To ensure successful voter awareness and registration, sensitisation and awareness creation campaigns are required among both voters and political parties. For a country undertaking its first election since independence, these are extremely important, holding significant implications for the quality and outcome of the election.

Sensitising local communities and party loyalists is essential to guarantee management and acceptance of outcomes to prevent post-electoral violence. For South Sudan, emerging from conflict and new to democracy, developing a civic understanding of electoral procedures and stipulated rights and responsibilities is important for peaceful participation. Without civic education, disputes may escalate into violence by allowing the elite to control the narrative and subjecting communities to manipulation.

The Panel of the Wise or an envoy should drive diplomatic discussions on the election context

Security and judiciary apparatuses are crucial to a peaceful election and to a secure environment and democratic dispute resolution mechanism thereafter. However, neither is up to the task. A census – underlined as an election prerequisite in the peace agreement – has been hindered by a lack of security and infrastructure nationwide and meagre resources. These factors are likely to lead to a disputed election or another extension, both of which may reverse gains and spur a resurgence of conflict.

Lack of pressure

The multifaceted implications posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, coinciding with the start of South Sudan’s transition, diverted international and regional resources from effective oversight of implementation. The AU and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), as the continental and regional bodies that brokered R-ARCSS, witnessed time-, capacity- and resource constraints.

The war that broke out in north Ethiopia at the end of 2020 and the crisis in Sudan further diverted attention from peace agreement implementation. Thus, the guarantors’ role has been reduced, at least in pressing the signatories to identify and resolve deadlocks timeously.

The Reconstituted Joint Evaluation and Monitoring Commission is mandated to report to the guarantors on non-compliance. It must report violations and issues to the chairperson of IGAD to decide appropriate and timely remedial actions. IGAD is lagging behind in mobilising means and resources to fast-track milestones needed for the election.

However, as guarantors, AU and IGAD should look beyond just monitoring R-ARCSS progress. The AU’s PSC followed a field mission to the country with a discussion in February 2023. In November 2023, it stated concerns and suggestions not in keeping with the gravity of the threat posed in South Sudan.

The country’s challenges are also bound to increase when President Salva Kiir becomes IGAD chair in July 2024, replacing Djibouti’s President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh. Then, for the six months leading to the election, the agreement’s main guarantor will be chaired by a signatory party. This is a crucial time for South Sudan and its peace process. IGAD’s role will be complicated as holding meetings and decisions on South Sudan will require authorisations from Juba, posing a conflict of interest.

PSC role

The PSC should focus on addressing the absence of pressure from South Sudan’s partners and the risks posed by a disputed election. The subsequent challenges and competing interests within IGAD will also require greater involvement of the AU as an impartial entity. The Council should play an early warning role and monitor continental actors’ involvement in the lead-up to the election.

The PSC could request an update on preparations for the election, this could be followed by a field visit early in 2024 to assess the readiness of state structures and the political context in which the election will unfold. It should also secure the involvement of the Panel of the Wise or an envoy to drive preventive diplomatic engagements to manage the context for an election in Africa’s youngest state.
Can revised AU policy give youth an active peacebuilding role?

Despite the AU’s various youth inclusion initiatives, practical and meaningful youth participation in peace and security remains a challenge. Countries haven’t translated these initiatives into national policy, and generally have weak youth-centred approaches that amount to tokenism rather than real inclusion.

The end of November marks Africa’s third Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) Awareness Week. The latest revision of the PCRD policy includes youth as one of two new pillars (the other is environmental security). But can the new policy, set to be launched in 2024, give young people an active role in peacebuilding?

Peacebuilding is currently at a crossroads, affected by several global changes, including COVID-19 and geopolitical wars. And while peacebuilding was previously centred around post-conflict activity, the new PCRD policy deals with the pre-conflict and during-conflict stages. This reflects a global paradigm shift, articulated by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres’s New Agenda for Peace. The new agenda calls for a refocus on prevention and integration as the future of peacebuilding.

AU member states generally have weak youth-centered national policies and approaches that amount to tokenism rather than real inclusion.

While including youth is not new to the PCRD’s activities, the policy focus and application must go beyond top-down engagement. To make a real impact, young people need to be empowered and centred in peacebuilding activities. AU initiatives such as the Continental Framework for Youth, Peace and Security have taken a broader approach to youth inclusion by addressing issues like youth rights and access to essential services. By contrast, the revised PCRD policy focuses on four tangible objectives to increase young people’s role in peacebuilding: protection, prevention, cooperation and partnerships.

The policy recognises the importance of education to equip young Africans with the knowledge to address emerging challenges and contribute to stability on the continent. This includes tailored education programmes (both primary and tertiary) and mentorship initiatives. The policy should also emphasise the integration of peace education into school curricula from an early age.

Specific country targets for skills development could also be set by the policy, such as improving blue economy skills for the youth of coastal cities. Lessons could be taken from initiatives such as the Rwanda Youth in
Agribusiness Forum, which has provided young people with farming and entrepreneurial skills, enabling them to contribute to economic growth and stability in their communities.

The policy also encourages youth entrepreneurship in post-conflict settings through support for business initiatives. Such initiatives can leverage technologies and digital platforms, creating new opportunities for youth-led startups. An example is Uganda’s Girls in ICT programme, which gives young women digital literacy and coding skills, enhances their employability, and promotes gender equality in the tech industry.

The PSC has ambitious goals for its member states to domesticate youth national action plans by 2024 and 2029

To move beyond mere tokenism, young people also need to be integrated into negotiating teams and thematic committees, and included as witnesses and observers to peace agreements. Youth delegates could play a crucial role in building peace both within and outside the negotiation room.

In August, the AU Mediation and Dialogue Division engaged young people in high-level decision making during the consultative meeting on setting up the WiseYouth Network. This was a useful process, but by taking lessons from the revised PCRD policy, WiseYouth can deepen the role of youth in mediation by increasing their influence and contributions.

As with all AU policies, the effectiveness of the PCRD policy will hinge on whether it is domesticated and implemented at country level.

On 3 November, the AU’s PSC underscored the importance of collaboration in implementing the Continental Framework for Youth, Peace and Security. As 2024 approaches – the midpoint of the framework’s implementation – the PSC has set ambitious targets for member states: 25% youth-led National Action Plans by 2024 and 50% by 2029 at the regional level. So far, progress has been limited, with only a handful of countries developing youth, peace and security action plans.

An April 2023 roundtable to promote national youth action plans brought together countries that have already adopted the plans, like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria. States where the plans are in progress also attended, including Cameroon, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe. Burundi, Kenya, Namibia, The Gambia and Uganda expressed strong interest in following suit.

To achieve meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding, African nations and the AU must prioritise implementing youth-centred policies and initiatives in line with the revised PCRD policy.
The AU 2023 theme is ‘Accelerating the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). How do you assess the AU’s promotion and implementation of AfCFTA to achieve a common AU approach towards economic integration?

AfCFTA has generated significant excitement in Africa and there has been solid progress. Our forecast, which compares the impact of eight sectoral scenarios for each African country, indicates that the agreement’s full implementation will contribute more than other sectors to poverty reduction and average incomes. In the long term, it will do better than an agricultural revolution or a manufacturing transition, facilitating both.

Africa will not develop without regional trade integration since its individual markets are too small. Nor will we be able to go up the export value chain, attract foreign investment or become part of global value chains. The need and motivation for AfCFTA are, therefore, clear, but implementation is now imperative.

Many questions remain, however. Given the impasse in the region over the western Sahara, how will North African countries participate? What do we do about coups and unconstitutional changes of government or with countries torn by conflict, such as Libya, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. And what about our porous borders?

A major objective of this year’s theme is to domesticate AfCFTA and capacitate member states to develop strategic action plans to hasten implementation. In your view was this objective achieved?

AfCFTA implementation is a process, not an event but, as of 2022, 44 of 55 member states had domesticated it into their laws, and developed and adopted national implementation strategies. AfCFTA committees have been established in many countries to oversee implementation. Typically, the head of state or government chairs these committees, including representatives from ministries, businesses and civil society.

The strategies outline the steps countries will take, including addressing non-tariff barriers, promoting trade and investment and building capacity. The AU has also provided technical assistance to member states to develop their strategies, including training, legal advice and development of implementation tools and resources. So progress has been substantial.

Eight countries have participated in the AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative (GTI), which seeks to facilitate trade among member states that meet minimum requirements. Has this initiative successfully enhanced trade among the piloted countries and improved supply chains?

The AU Commission found that the value of trade among the countries increased by 20% in 2022 compared to that of 2021 and the average customs-clearance time is apparently 30% shorter. But since trade among African countries has generally increased over this period it’s difficult to pinpoint the exact contribution of the GTI.

AfCFTA implementation is a process, not an event but, as of 2022, 44 of 55 member states had domesticated it into their laws.

Another indicator of progress is the establishment of the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System, which allows African businesses to settle transactions in African currencies. This reduces transaction costs and promotes trade among African countries. AfCFTA has also adopted rules of origin for over 87% of tariff lines. And African governments are harmonising regulations in competition policy, intellectual property rights and investment to create a more predictable and business-friendly environment. Early indications of progress are, therefore, promising.
The AU’s Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa’s Development has produced a progress report of the first Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063, which expires in December 2023. What successes are reported?

The document consolidated progress reports from 38 of 55 AU member states, but we don’t know about the other 17. And data in Africa are often problematic. The report finds a positive, upward trend in all seven aspirations against 2021 targets. Most promising were advances in the attainment of aspiration 2 ‘An integrated continent politically united and based on the ideal of Pan-Africanism and the Vision for Africa’s Renaissance’.

The strong 84% performance was due mainly to the signing and ratification of AfCFTA, effective 1 January 2021, and to the establishment and operationalisation of the AfCFTA secretariat in Accra, Ghana. There must, however, be concern about progress towards a peaceful and secure Africa, which is aspiration 4. The litany of coups and levels of violence would appear to indicate the reverse.

What key lessons and best practices should member states and the AU Commission adopt during the second 10-year plan (2024 to 2033)?

The progress report for the first ten years is candid in the limited progress in aspiration 1 ‘A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development’ and aspiration 3 ‘An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law’.

There must be concern about aspiration 4 – progress towards a peaceful and secure Africa. The litany of coups and levels of violence would appear to indicate the reverse.

The cumulative impact of the 2007/08 financial crisis, COVID, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and United States/China tensions on top of increased climate change has translated into a slow-growth world. Among many implications, such a world needs fewer commodities and we are still heavily commodity export dependent.

Africa needs to grow much more rapidly. AfCFTA progress is key, although insufficient. To grow regional trade we need connecting infrastructure, a better-educated and healthier workforce and facilitating policies, among others. That requires substantially more funding at much lower interest rates than currently available.

Instead of growth through foreign direct investment, I sense that Africa is heading for serious debt challenges. This is likely to culminate in some type of debt standstill and debt forgiveness if one looks at the trouble that debt discussions in Zambia have run into. Then there is the democratic regression, long evident in the developed world, that has also come to Africa.
These two outcomes, slow growth and democratic regression are, of course, closely linked. In our analysis, the latter is largely a result of the former. Outcomes include a rash of coups in Francophone Africa. In 2020, we did a detailed study on the impact of COVID on Africa’s development prospects and the results have stood the test of time. Government revenues collapsed with COVID, poverty increased and incomes declined.

On average, Africa lost three to four years of development through COVID. Average incomes returned to their 2019 levels only four years later. On the current development trajectory, Africa will return to its 2019 pre-COVID level of extremely poor people (roughly 21.4% of Africa’s population using US$2.15) in 2034! We are making progress but more needs to be done.

Two unconstitutional changes of government occurred in 2023 with a lack of development, poor investments in infrastructure and external economic shocks as contributing factors. What do you project for governance on the continent in 2024 and how can the AU better address deficits to achieve Agenda 2063?

The organisation should be doing more. In my view, it has gone backwards in collapsing the departments of peace and security and governance. The African Peace and Security Architecture is neither operational nor fit for purpose. Instead of rigorous election monitoring, it seems to stand by when leaders manipulate constitutions to extend their stays in power. The importance of democracy is, of course, being challenged globally, evident in the development successes of the Asian Tigers and, more recently, China.

Consensus on the importance of democracy for development is much weaker today. The AU should reinvigorate its efforts to ensure that elections are truly free and fair and report on that without fear or favour. The AU Commission should re-establish its early warning unit and insulate it from interference by member states through, for example, the PSC.

Perhaps even more important, it should develop and rigorously implement a protocol on good governance that commits all governments to full transparency on, for just one example, all sovereign loan agreements. There is no reason why loan and public-private partnership agreements are not in the public domain.
About the PSC Report

The Peace and Security Council Report analyses developments and decisions at the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC). The monthly publication is the only one of its kind dedicated to providing current analysis of the PSC’s work. It is written by a team of ISS analysts in Addis Ababa.

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