Strengthening Africa-Led Peacebuilding in Stabilisation Contexts

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Abstract

While the primary responsibility of the United Nations (UN) is to secure global peace, it has continued to emphasise the importance of partnerships with regional organisations. Consequently, the UN tends to get involved only after a relative level of peace is established. Conversely, the wider international community looks to regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) to address peacebuilding matters. It suggests that the AU has a relative level of agency to play a pivotal role in supporting national bottom-up and localised bottom-up peacebuilding initiatives crucial to the overarching aims of peace and stability. However, peacebuilding efforts often take a backseat in persistent violent conflicts, with stabilisation efforts taking centre stage. The paper examines the AU's peacebuilding efforts to address conflicts and argues that, while these efforts are welcomed, its peacebuilding efforts can maintain and strengthen existing social structures, resulting in peacebuilding becoming a source of tension that legitimises some actors over others. The paper suggests that the AU must re-evaluate how it approaches peacebuilding in complex stabilisation environments and calls for a peacebuilding framework that considers the interconnectedness within the context of stabilisation.

Keywords: African-led peacebuilding, Africa, African Union, stabilisation

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1. Introduction

Peacebuilding became popular after 1992, when the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992) presented his report, "An Agenda for Peace". In this report, Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding as "a range of activities aimed at identifying and supporting structures" that will strengthen and harden peace and prevent deterioration into conflict. For the UN, peacebuilding and approaches to peacebuilding are distinguishable from peacemaking and peacekeeping, but equally interconnected (1992). The term "peacebuilding" has its roots in research by Johan Galtung (1976), who coined the term "approaches to peace" (1976). Collectively, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding articulate a general theory of attaining or preserving peace. As Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse (1999) note, "Peacemaking aims to change the attitudes of the main protagonists, peacekeeping lowers the level of destructive behaviour, and peacebuilding tries to overcome the contradictions which lie at the root of the conflict" (Miall et al., 1999). Others have put forward dissimilar proposals, approaches, and techniques for peacebuilding, such as peacebuilding through indigenous thinking (Murithi, 2015), music, conversation, reconciliation and non-violence teaching. Each approach to peacebuilding has its uniqueness and significance but also its challenges (Murithi, 2008). As the term "peacebuilding" has evolved, so too has its categorisation. For example, Schirch (2008) argues that peacebuilding aims to "prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence in all forms, even structural violence" (Schirch, 2008). Conversely, the term "strategic peacebuilding" was developed to recognise the intricacy of the responsibilities essential to shape peace. In essence, peacebuilding is deliberate when resources, actors and tactics are coordinated to achieve numerous objectives and address several problems over an extended period. Strategic peacebuilding also includes multiple "well-coordinated approaches to transform violence and conflict into more sustainable, peaceful relationships and structures (2008: 13)." Consequently, peacebuilding can be regarded as an essential tool for re-establishing security and stability and initiating a process of nation-building during and after prolonged conflicts.

However, in 2024, an estimated one in six people worldwide were affected by conflict, with 50 countries experiencing "extreme", "high" or "turbulent" levels of unrest (ACLED, 2024). This underscores that while existing approaches to peacebuilding have played a role, key to their success is the need to develop

effective regional peacebuilding frameworks for stability, resilience, conflict resolution and the establishment of peace. Nonetheless, with the rise of regionalism, peace processes have increasingly become collaborative efforts between the UN and regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) in the Global South. In 2015, then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon emphasised this point, arguing that "regional organisations should continue contributing to United Nations peace and security efforts … we count on them for political leverage as well as civilian and military capacities" (UN, 2015:10). While the connection between peace efforts and the attainment of sustainable peace remains profound (Walter, Howard and Page Fortna, 2021), scholars have called for a renewed focus that emphasises the effectiveness of associations and corporations in fostering regional peace and security and argued for initiatives that enhance our capacity to confront the multifaceted challenges of peacebuilding (Obi, Bereketeab and Adetula, 2020). Some scholars note that reforming donor monitoring, evaluation and learning systems that prioritise short-term, quantitative metrics that fail to focus on continuously monitoring the feedback from a diverse array of local stakeholders could help to prevent perverse incentives that constrain the ability of country staff to engage, learn from and adapt to the conflict-affected contexts they are supposed to be helping (Autesserre, 2014; Campbell, 2018).

However, institutions like the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) operate in highly complex and dynamic environments. These environments have led institutions like the AU to respond with an array of stabilisation approaches, comprising various tools in protracted conflicts (Tchie, 2024). Nevertheless, existing models of peacebuilding cannot deal with environments where there is ongoing conflict, as dynamics of violence continue to fluctuate; thus, access to deploy peacebuilding efforts remains limited. This means that there is a need for a more adaptive and holistic approach based on African-led efforts closer to the context. As the Global South plays a greater role in addressing and creating environments for peace and stability, regional organisations need to show a strategic responsibility in peacebuilding across the continent. Therefore, efforts should examine what regional organisations like the AU are doing and reconceptualise how these entities can engage in peacebuilding in an adaptive, holistic and African-led manner.

Despite the best intentions of the liberal peacebuilding approach to state resilience, existing models fail to address many of the growing challenges the African

continent faces, including their interconnectedness. Therefore, there is a need to articulate a unique African-led peacebuilding effort that can support how institutions like the AU and RECs respond and operate in complex contexts where violence occurs and communities must rebuild. Therefore, an African-led effort framework should prevent the recurrence of violence, foster long-term stability, and repairing societal, economic, and institutional fractures in post-conflict zones. The paper's central argument is that peacebuilding needs to be theoretically rethought across the African continent. However, to achieve this change, adaptation as a tool for improving stabilisation outcomes is needed to move existing AU-led systems towards a more effective equilibrium that can bring together the various entities and draw on context-specific, African-led mechanisms.

2. Research design

The paper draws on three research methods. First, the methodology is based on comprehending relational and contextually situated agency, in which configurations and agency are repeated throughout. To this end, the paper draws on existing academic empirical inquiry to understand how the AU, as a regional institution, has evolved and how it carries out peacebuilding efforts. Thus, the paper assesses how the AU can support more integrated peacebuilding approaches that align with other regional and national efforts, especially in an embryonic political environment created by explicit circumstances and constraints that can yield dissimilar consequences. Second, the paper draws on the AU process in developing its recent 2024 Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy, as well as interviews with senior AU experts, civil society organisations and advisers. The study implemented a sequence of semi-structured key informant discussions with contributors and relied on an existing linkage of bureaucrats. Additional discussions were managed through a cumulative process, which yielded supplementary information from specialists. Respondents' inputs were anonymised to safeguard safety and encourage an open conversation. The interviews were conducted from the third quarter of 2024 to the end of the first quarter of 2025. Finally, the paper consulted AU reports, official documents and AU Peace and Security Council statements to determine the AU's formal stance relative to the proximity of the proposed policies.

The following section examines the literature on peacebuilding over the last three decades and argues for a more context-specific, holistic response that supports

state resilience. The section's core argument is that the literature should adjust its thinking on how peacebuilding is conducted on the African continent and allow entities like the AU and RECs to play a structural role through African-led implementation strategies. The next section briefly examines the evolution of peacebuilding from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), an African intergovernmental organisation established on 25 May 1963 in Addis Ababa, until it was transformed into the AU. This is followed by a discussion of the AU's institutional efforts in peacebuilding, in which it argues that the institution is best placed to support a more holistic approach. The following section examines some of the AU's peacebuilding tools. It touches on some initiatives and the wide range of regional organisations and roles at play across the continent. While this section is not a systematic assessment of efforts to date, the paper provides an overview of some of these efforts. The next section presents a new framework for addressing African peacebuilding and focuses on how the AU can better connect its peacebuilding efforts in a stabilisation context. The final section provides concluding thoughts.

3. Literature on peacebuilding

Over the last three decades, the initiation of peacebuilding efforts has often been driven by political interests, strategic objectives, humanitarian concerns and, more recently, an overfocus on security means (stabilisation efforts). Policymakers typically focused on pressing immediate issues such as humanitarian aid and preventing further violence. As a result, peacebuilding is hardly uniform throughout African states and focused on capital cities and urban areas. This has produced longstanding consequences that could potentially aggravate the tensions that initially sparked the conflict. Interventions are often based on a mix of moral imperatives and strategic calculations,[1] and short- to medium-term programmes funded by organisations with narrow focuses.[2] For instance, humanitarian needs often justify interventions, such as addressing mass atrocities or preventing large-scale displacement (Bellamy, 2010). The reasons for continuing or terminating peacebuilding efforts can shift dramatically as conflicts evolve. Political changes, shifts in strategic priorities and the emergence of new humanitarian crises often influence the decision-making process.[3] For example, the changing political

1 Interview with AU personnel 001, November 2024.

2 Interview with AU personnel 001, November 2024.

3 Interview with AU personnel 005, January 2025.

landscape in donor countries or the strategic reorientation of regional powers can lead to the recalibration or withdrawal of support (Williams, 2011). Furthermore, the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts is frequently reassessed based on donor impact on conflict resolution and stability (Holt, 2019). Nonetheless, the focus on these variables has significantly influenced the trajectory of various conflicts, with external actors bringing their own motivations to the table (Ramuhala, 2011). In some cases, the efforts led to donors eventually ceasing their peacebuilding efforts, adding newer levels of difficulty, which creates new dynamics that impact actors' incentives (Autesserre, 2014; Campbell, 2018). These motivations may include geopolitical ambitions, economic investments and regional stability (Kobayashi, Krause and Yuan, 2025). The involvement of these actors often introduces a different set of priorities and approaches,[4] reflecting a broader spectrum of international interests and strategies. The changes in strategic priorities can radically shift when the narrative and agenda centre on pitting Western against non-Western actors, like China and Russia (ibid.). On the ground, this Western and non-Western lens can lead to an alignment or misalignment between international actors' rationales and the needs of affected populations or local communities, undermining the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts (De Coning, 2013). These dynamics can manifest as international strategies that do not consider local contexts but are driven primarily by external interests. Resultantly, these interventions fail to address the root causes of conflict and often exacerbate existing tensions (Tieku et al., 2021).

These complex interplays and challenges have led scholars to recognise that peacebuilding is no longer considered an "imposition" by a central state. Studies of wartime order-making have pointed out that external interventions must recognise and negotiate the agency of local actors if they are to reshape this complex web of relationships in intended ways (Worrall, 2017). Recent work by De Coning (2018) emphasises the necessity of understanding the complexity of the environment and finding adaptive peacebuilding approaches that include various stakeholders within an evolving context. This approach has become known as adaptive peacebuilding, where the affected populations anticipate benefitting from conflict resolution or peacebuilding that ensures their full involvement in all aspects of the intervention.

4 Interview with AU personnel 002, December 2024.

Adaptive peacebuilding encompasses six core principles for managing complexity in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. First, the measures taken to guarantee the sustainability of a peace intervention must be environment- and time-specific and involve the local people. Second, adaptive peacebuilding is a goal-oriented approach that necessitates working collectively with the involved associates to identify the proposed peacebuilding achievement. Third, adaptive peacebuilding remains cognisant of its method to achieve its purposes – a participatory process that facilitates the emergence of a goal-oriented outcome. Fourth, given the uncertainty of outcomes, adaptive peacebuilding makes provision for various intervention options across a spectrum of probabilities. Fifth, the intervention hinges on feedback to ascertain which actions yield the most positive impact. Adaptive peacebuilding necessitates the participation of all stakeholders in decision-making processes that reject inappropriate actions that could lead to damaging consequences and allow those that demonstrate potential, offer alternative options, or can be scaled up for a more significant impact. At a tactical level, this entails evaluating norms and regulating premeditated arrangements. Sixth, adaptive peacebuilding is an iterative process that occurs continuously. It requires ongoing assessments in highly complex contexts that monitor new dynamics as they emerge. Finally, this approach advocates for enhanced support in areas such as funding for capacity, coordination and essential resources that communities require, while striving to avoid external influence and control over the processes and programmes (De Coning, 2018).

Drawing on Schirch (2008) and De Coning (2018), this paper argues that while peacebuilding in Africa is not new and is rooted in the cradle of African history, there is a need for existing peacebuilding to adopt a more holistic approach centred on strengthening peacebuilding in stabilisation contexts. More recent scholarship argues that peacebuilding should be conceived as an integral component of dialogues, occurring alongside the state-building continuum in the affected societies (Olonisakin, Kifle and Muteru, 2021). Other scholars of peacebuilding have focused on the effectiveness of alliances and partnerships in fostering regional peace and security and argue for initiatives that enhance the capacity to confront the multifaceted challenges of peacebuilding (Obi, Bereketeab and Adetula, 2020). Furthermore, this paper posits that conflicts are not limited to a fixed environment but fluctuate over time, dynamics and context (Arı and Gizelis, 2020). Institutions like the AU and RECs operate in highly complex, dynamic environments, which

have led institutions like the AU to implement an array of stabilisation approaches that comprise various tools in protracted conflicts (Tchie, 2024). This underscores the need for African peacebuilding initiatives to respond and operate in complex contexts characterised by unpredictable and ongoing dynamics of violence and communities that continually strive to rebuild.

The following section reflects on the history and evolution of peacebuilding from the OAU to the AU, and on how AU-led peacebuilding can adapt its approach to draw on innovative strategies to effectively address the underlying contradictions and root causes of conflict across diverse contexts. Using the adaptive peacebuilding model, the paper considers the need to rethink the AU's approach to peacebuilding in multifaceted stabilisation environments.

4. Evolution of peacebuilding by the AU

Article 52(1) of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter recognises the existence of regional arrangements or agencies that address matters related to maintaining international peace and security as appropriate for regional action (UN, 1945).[5] The transition of the OAU to the AU has led to regional organisations' involvement in peacebuilding in Africa becoming an integral part of the international peacebuilding system. As the context has changed, so has the AU experience in peacebuilding. This experience evolved from lessons drawn from the OAU and the AU's adoption of UN-driven ideals that promote a comprehensive approach to peace and development. As a result, institutions like the AU have been able to develop distinct strategies for peacebuilding linked to its African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

The AU's APSA rests on five pillars: the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early-Warning System, the Standby Force, and the Peace Fund. Two of these pillars are aimed at peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. The first is the PSC, which promotes peace, security and stability across the continent. Its duties include anticipating conflicts, engaging in preventative diplomacy and facilitating peace through mediation and conciliation. Under Article 5.2 of the AU Constitutive Act, Article 2.1 of the Protocol established the PSC as "a standing decision-making organ for the prevention,

5 Increased international activism by the UN, AU, RECs, political groupings and other parts of the international community has played a role in peacebuilding, which has varied across the African continent.

management and resolution of conflicts" that should be "a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crises in Africa" (AU, 2002b). Additionally, the PSC is tasked with peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction, humanitarian initiatives and disaster management. The PSC was not part of the AU Constitutive Act (approved in Lomé, Togo, in July 2001). The PSC was derived from an ad hoc procedure to change the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution that had been adopted by the OAU's Assembly of Heads of State and Government in June 1993 (Muyangwa and Vogt, 2000). Establishing the PSC has led to significant agency for the body. For example, the 2002 African Union Constitutive Act further solidified these principles, defining the organisation's role in peace and post-conflict reconstruction, enabling nations to pursue stability and democratic governance (OAU, 1993). In line with the AU's standing on peacebuilding matters, the 899th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council of the AU convened in Luanda, Angola, on 5 December 2019. The PSC urgently called upon the AU Commission to draft a Common African Position (CAP) in preparation for the review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture scheduled for 2020 (AU, 2014). Just as the Cairo Mechanism established intervention principles in domestic affairs, the AU's Lomé Declaration of 2000 introduced a crucial principle against unconstitutional changes in government (AU, 2000). The efforts of the PSC demonstrate a significant shift in the pillars of peacebuilding efforts across the continent.

The AU Assembly, at its 35th Ordinary Session (AU, 2022), along with the PSC called for the scrutiny of the 2006 PCRD policy (AU, 2006) to realign and adapt to the progressing security dynamics (AU, 2021b).[6] The 1047th session emphasised the need of widening the framework of AU PCRD actions, which involve integrating a peacebuilding dimension and covering the entire conflict-cycle phase – pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict. It states: "The revised policy notes that contemporary conflicts in Africa exhibit a non-linear nature, requiring engagements and interventions throughout a peace continuum for dynamic, sufficient and timely responses at the various stages of conflict" (AU, 2024a).

6 The PCRD policy was designed to help African countries prevent conflict from recurring and support peacebuilding. In 2024, the AU revised this policy (AU, 2024b). The core objectives of the policy are to improve timeliness, effectiveness and coordination of activities in post-conflict countries and to lay the foundation for social justice and sustainable peace. It has become the main AU policy on peacebuilding, which is delivered through its Centre of Excellence in Cairo (AU, 2021a).

The agency of the PSC can also be witnessed during its 1188th session on 29 November 2023, when it took steps to address PCRD by strongly urging the Commission to accelerate the review process of the AU PCRD policy and promptly present the draft for PSC consideration. This initiative stemmed from the valuable insights gained during the review processes held in Accra and Cairo in September 2022 and May/June 2023, respectively and ensures that AU peacebuilding efforts are effectively integrated with the evolving frameworks of APSA and the African Governance Architecture (AGA).[7] The AU PSC convened its 1198th session on 31 January 2024 to consider the AU PCRD policy and acknowledged the efforts of Egypt, as the AU champion for PCRD and Angola, as the champion of Africa Day of Peace and Reconciliation. These initiatives are designed to strengthen the AU's peacebuilding and PCRD architecture with the establishment of the AU PCRD Centre in Cairo[8] and the launch of a Working Group on AU PCRD.[9] The PSC indicated that steps were being taken toward institutionalising the annual joint consultative meetings between the AUPSC and the UN's Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), as agreed at the sixth Informal Joint Annual Consultative Meeting, held in Addis Ababa on 13 November 2023. The CAP review has become essential for advancing Agenda 2063, particularly its hallmark programme, Silencing the Guns in Africa (AU, 2015), underscoring Africa's role as a player in global peacebuilding efforts. This is particularly important given that the new agenda calls for a refocus on prevention and integration as the future of peacebuilding, which reflects a global paradigm shift articulated by UN Secretary-General António Guterres's New Agenda for Peace (UN, 2023). Equally, it highlights the agency of these institutions and their contributions, while strengthening the transition from OAU to AU and the important contribution they have made to this progress through the role of the AU PSC.

The second component of the APSA peacebuilding mechanism is the Continental Early-Warning System (CEWS) for conflict prevention (Makinda and Okumu,

7 The AGA is a mechanism for dialogue between stakeholders that are mandated to promote good governance and bolster democracy.

8 However, the revised policy highlights that "the AU's strategic policy direction will be underpinned by ownership of its PCRD and peacebuilding mechanisms and processes, which external partners largely finance."

9 The new framework also includes revitalising the interdepartmental Task Force on PCRD, reactivating the PSC Sub-Committee on PCRD, and fully operationalising the PCRD Centre.

2015). Article 3 of the AU Constitutive Act states that the AU "should promote peace, security, and stability on the continent" (AU, 2000). CEWS was complemented by the African Solidarity Initiative (ASI) and the African Peace Fund (APF). However, the framework for operationalising CEWS was only endorsed in January 2007, and it was not fully operationalised until 2012, a decade after its formation. Nevertheless, the reform process proposed by the Kagame Report (AU, 2017) commissioned by the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government (AU, 2018) has also led to this pillar being incorporated across the new portfolio department. This resulted in its major functions being crippled in coordination and harmonisation with RECs and assisting member states in conflict analysis and mitigation.[10] Additionally, the establishment of the new department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security has meant that the early-warning system analysts were redeployed to regional desks.[11]

However, since 2017, the AU's institutional reforms process, designed to increase its efficiency and effectiveness, has hit the organisation hard. In response, the AU introduced the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a socio-economic programme designed to promote sustainable growth and development on the continent. Founded in 2001, NEPAD aims to eradicate poverty, integrate Africa into the global economy and empower women. NEPAD is designed to complement CEWS, support post-conflict reconstruction and mobilise resources for the APF, ensuring that nations can rebuild and thrive (AU, 2002a). It acts as the implementing arm of the AU's Agenda 2063 development strategy (AU, 2002a).

Additionally, the AU actively collaborates with RECs, leveraging their local knowledge and expertise to manage conflict-affected regions' peace and security matters. On a broader scale, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) contribute invaluable inputs, enhancing Africa's capacity for effective peacebuilding. These partnerships are essential for creating a stable and prosperous future for all African nations.

The next section highlights some of the AU peacebuilding efforts. It argues that while the movement in policy has been welcomed, it has relied primarily on military efforts not aligned with the advancement of the PSC's peacebuilding initiatives. In this regard, the section argues for the AU's adoption of a more

10 Interview with AU personnel 002, December 2024.

11 Interview with AU personnel 005, February 2024.

holistic approach to peacebuilding that interacts with national and local peacebuilding efforts.

5. AU's peacebuilding efforts

International approaches to peacebuilding tend to highlight training peacekeepers at the cost of formulating preventative measures and analysis required to provide solutions for underlying violence.[12] As a result, there has been an increased focus on the AU's role in Peace Support Operations (PSOs) (Tchie, 2023c), often at the expense of broader peacebuilding and political experience that the AU has been able to contribute. While the AU has built up a significant level of agency in the development of the ASF concept – as demonstrated through its PSOs deployment and outlined by the Africa Defense Forum (ADF, 2025) – African agency extends beyond peacekeeping and includes diverse forms of political, economic and social influence contributing to global issues. It is noteworthy that the APSA mechanism, designed to connect peacebuilding efforts at the AU and RECs/Regional Mechanisms (RMs) levels, has made some significant strides. However, more broadly, there has been a lack of political will, or at least a subordination of significant African interests to those of individual states and leaders. Consequently, the AU's peacebuilding labours, apart from those highlighted above by the PSC, are often restricted to working with external actors and disconnected engagement (Jackson, 2019). As a result, parallel peacebuilding efforts by other African actors often (unintentionally) undermine the AU's efforts, due in large measure to the AU's pace, style or dynamism not matching international actors' or funders' timelines (Curtis, 2013).

Consequently, the AU has been unable to develop and coherently connect many of its peacebuilding tools, as it has done with more recent tools such as its PSO capacities. Subsequently, this has led to the underdevelopment of the AU's broader peacebuilding effort, especially those that need to connect with efforts by RECs and RMs. The underdevelopment of the AU's peacebuilding tools has rendered them unfit for purpose or inappropriate for the evolution and nature of the current conflicts in Africa (Prah, 2024; ACCORD, 2015). This means that while the responses have tended to be militarised in a stabilisation context, very rarely do AU PSO efforts connect with AU peacebuilding tools or responses, leaving the PSO disconnected. Thus, the AU's peacebuilding tools have not evolved or adapted

12 Interview with NGO Executive 008, Addis Ababa, July 2025.

adequately for implementation in a stabilisation context. When overlapped with efforts by the PSC (which has been able to significantly push the needle forward and recognise the current continental stabilisation context), the alignment in consolidating gains remains unexploited (De Coning and Tchie, 2023). The limited toolbox open to the AU has also meant an overreliance on PSOs rather than mediation missions, leading to an overreliance on force to solve the continent's peace and security issues (Tchie, 2023c). Consequently, the overuse of military-focused approaches through PSOs – a wide variety of military activities, including counterinsurgency, warfighting, stabilisation, human rights protection, counterterrorism, state building and regime defence – weaponises the entire process. It encourages actors to resort to arms rather than seek non-coercive methods to resolve issues.

Some researchers conclude that the presence of several actors engaged in peacebuilding on the continent is a significant challenge (Tchie, 2023b). Other scholars argue that to realise the objectives of peacebuilding on the continent, the undertakings of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Africa and the efforts of state institutions and international organisations require improved coordination (Karbo, 2008). This reflects an understanding that African peacebuilding consists of multiple levels, contexts, actors and spillovers of conflicts across national borders. Consequently, efforts are focused on the causes of conflicts, which are often complex and protracted and can be less acquiescent to peacebuilding (2008). While efforts to recognise the role of traditional approaches in developing social harmony at the local level to rebuild relations fundamental to peaceful societies, efforts in this area are, for the most part, romanticised and excluded from dominant conflict resolution processes. Exacerbating fragile circumstances has become a feature of the state as the essential actor. This has led to a one-dimensionality that fails to capture local complexities or the interrelationships between individuals within the state and non-state actors (Tchie, 2025). Consequently, this limited thinking tends to have long-term consequences that are rarely contemplated (De Coning, 2023). This tendency to provide rapid responses, which limit more comprehensive and well-considered processes, not only exacerbates the situation and compromises the peace environment but also decreases the chances of peacebuilding success. Underlying these challenges is the inability of these processes to deal with the root causes and local protection measures, focusing only on the symptoms of the issue, rendering substantial

peacebuilding efforts dead on arrival (De Coning, 2020). Consequently, peacebuilding has been compacted into nominal prototypes based on agendas and templates.

The AU's continent-wide efforts lack a common framework around which to mobilise competing interests and agendas (Tschirgi, 2015). This leads to scholars like Aning (2024: 7) to argue that "there is a need for conceptual clarity on the notion of peacebuilding". Furthermore, the literature's focus centres on how knowledge about peacebuilding is generated and not on how it can be reimagined for the current context (2024). In the next section, the paper provides a framework for how the AU can build on and connect with subregional, national and local peacebuilding efforts in a stabilisation context, using the adaptive-model approach to peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected environments.

6. Framework for responding to peacebuilding challenges in Africa

Several empirical works have highlighted the multifaceted nature of socio-political muddle in conflict-affected settings in response to the challenges of finding applicable structures for the peacebuilding predicament (see Boege et al., 2009; Bereketeab and Obi, 2020). This has culminated in a so-called "local turn" (Mac Ginty, 2010) and the development of models such as hybridity and adaptiveness in the peacebuilding knowledge (De Coning, 2020). Hybrid peacebuilding efforts blend formal processes like state-led negotiations and international mediation with traditional indigenous conflict resolution practices. This approach capitalises on both strengths, providing international legitimacy while honouring local ownership. This has resulted in an "increasingly globalised literature on peacebuilding" that deals with the encounter between the local and the international (McNamee and Muyangwa, 2021). More recent scholarship argues that the UN, AU and RECs/RMs have conducted and carried out several activities that can conceptually be viewed as distinctive stabilisation efforts designed to stabilise states, environments and regions. These stabilisation efforts have led to the deployment of the UN, AU and RECs/RMs in Somalia, the Lake Chad Basin, the Sahel and Mozambique; the East African Force has been deployed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Despite these efforts, the environments in which they operate have also struggled with peacebuilding efforts, impacting the sustainability of gains, affecting consistency of stability and creating further shocks on Africa's fragile peace and security landscape. Additionally, climate-related, cross-border challenges such as flooding, rising temperatures, drought and famine

are intricately connected with a complex security landscape characterised by conflict, political crises, violent extremism, terrorism and disputes over resource control. These can further increase vulnerability and weaken communities' capacity to tackle insecurity (NUPI and SIPRI, 2023).

To respond to this situation, scholars have argued for using an adaptive peacebuilding approach designed to understand the complexity of the environment, which includes continually mapping stakeholders within an evolving context. The adaptive peacebuilding approach aims to shift the focus to how peacebuilders can facilitate self-sustainable peace where peacebuilding emerges from within the conflict-affected social system for it to be sustainable (De Coning, 2018). To understand this complex social environment, these scholars posit that complexity theory allows for a better understanding of these inherently complex social systems and enables peacebuilders to adapt to non-linear social systems. Non-linear systems mean that the components in a system interact within dynamic, non-linear, and asymmetrical ways that result in some system-wide behaviour that cannot be predicted or pre-determined (Cilliers, 2000). Consequently, adaptive peacebuilding aims to facilitate and stimulate self-organisation by supporting conflict-affected communities in developing resilient social institutions that tackle shocks and stressors (De Coning, Chiyuki and Karlsrud, 2017). To sustain success, broad representation from the local community in decision-making is needed to ensure that initiatives are people-centred and evolve from within the conflict-affected communities (2017).

This paper adopts De Coning's (2018) adaptive peacebuilding approach and fuses this with Tschirgi's (2015) regional peacebuilding approach to provide a flexible, sensitive response to context-specific stabilisation environments where challenges cannot wait for settlement and in which institutions like the AU and RECs/RMs often find themselves, such as in the Lake Chad Basin and the Liptako-Gourma region. For affected communities to stop living under these circumstances, and for peace to be sustained, peacebuilding efforts must connect with ongoing stabilisation efforts deployed in persistent crises. The framework is designed to pivot how entities like the AU and RECs/RMs work collaboratively on peacebuilding with affected communities and is not a one-size-fits-all approach. The framework outlined below should be seen as an opportunity to strengthen the coordination efforts between the entities through a framework that contributes to a more predictable and strategic partnership in the areas of adaptive peace-

building. The next subsection presents 13 pillars for strengthening African peacebuilding efforts in the stabilisation context.

6.1. Pillar one (conflict prevention)

The AU PCRD policy is one instrument that promotes dialogue-centred conflict prevention and, ultimately, the realisation of "An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law" (AU, 2024b). This aligns with the need to tackle systemic issues such as governance deficits and resource inequities while emphasising national and local ownership and addressing the structural causes of conflict for effective transformation and lasting peace. The pillar focuses on incorporating the principles and synergy of the APSA and the AGA, designed to promote good governance and democracy in Africa, using the AU Constitutive Act and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG). The pillar's focus is on ensuring synergy and complementarity in building responsive institutions and processes, such as supporting the delivery of free, fair, and credible elections, socio-economic reconstruction, climate vulnerabilities, and development; and promoting national integration and incorporation, and regional infrastructures and mechanisms through regional integration. The pillar also focuses on the need for investment in conflict prevention through capacity building, research analysis and development and the use of knowledge products (see AU, 2024b). Finally, the pillar focuses on strengthening conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the work of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the AU PSC. It also seeks to align UN peacebuilding and prevention activities with regional and national frameworks. Therefore, the AU–UN partnership should exploit the collaboration initiatives between prevention and peacebuilding approaches and development agendas, particularly Agenda 2063.

6.2. Pillar two (inclusive democratic transition: effective and inclusive governance, peace dividends)

Democratic governance is the cornerstone of peace, given its tenets of inclusivity; its absence exacerbates conflicts across the continent. This pillar ensures the (re)establishment of the social contract, creating context-specific adaptive stabilisation strategies to support various arrangements for governments in transition. Collaboration such as the AU's Africa Facility to Support Inclusive Transitions (AFSIT), in partnership with the United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP) is needed to work towards supporting communities needing humanitarian assistance in all types of environments. To effectively achieve inclusive governance, it is essential to place state-building at the heart of the peacebuilding strategies to enhance national ownership and leadership of peacebuilding efforts.

6.3. Pillar three (women's multidimensional roles in peacebuilding)

Women are transformative agents in peacebuilding; therefore, centralising women's role in this pillar amplifies their interconnected roles, while ensuring child protection is not overlooked. The AU has taken significant steps to strengthen the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325 (UN, 2020). This has included adopting the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Maputo Protocol) and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA), reinforcing this agenda. The AU has taken crucial steps forward through initiatives like FemWise and the African Women Leadership Network (AWLN), designed to empower women and ensure their inclusion in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, efforts must be geared to a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach, establishing precise mechanisms to champion, monitor, and report on the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325. These mechanisms include the facilitation of the implementation through national and regional plans and frameworks, aligning them with the AU Continental Results Framework (CRF).

6.4. Pillar four (youth and peacebuilding)

Peacebuilding initiatives must design interventions for the protection of children, considering the specific needs of young girls and boys. It is important to ensure that peacebuilding interventions make child protection a priority. The UNSC Resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) highlight the role of youth in peace and security, and their role in "sustaining peace" under Resolution 2282 (2016), which provides essential policy frameworks for engaging young women and men in peacebuilding efforts. The PBC's Strategic Action Plan on youth and peacebuilding and its Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Strategy 2024–2026 provide a solid basis for youth inclusion and meaningful role in peacebuilding activities. The Continental Framework on YPS 2020–2029, adopted by the PSC during its 933rd meeting, further underscores this commitment. Similar to FemWise, the AU also launched the Network of African Youth (WiseYouth), providing a solid basis

for youth inclusion in peacebuilding efforts. Thus, it is imperative to mainstream youth in all national and regional peace and security policies and programmes. This includes implementing existing national and regional youth roadmaps and developing them where they do not exist voluntarily to ensure the timely and effective monitoring of commitments made. Furthermore, comprehensive research is vital to understanding the complex dynamics faced by youth in conflict zones. By highlighting these areas, youth can be empowered as pivotal change agents in pursuing durable peace.

6.5. Pillar five (transitional justice, transformative mediation, reconciliation, and human rights)

To amplify the effectiveness of transitional justice, initiatives must align with the provisions outlined in the AU Transitional Justice Policy (AU TJP) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16 – promoting peace, justice and strong institutions. Efforts should ensure support for the design of customised and tailor-made transitional justice mechanisms born from each country's context-specific environments, especially those that can adjust to respond to context-specific stabilisation environments. Policy should build on AU, regional and national policies and align with the right to development, economic and social rights, national and political civil rights, and protection aligned with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

6.6. Pillar six (building integrated capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and violent extremism)

The rise of terrorism and violent extremism is not just a security issue; it is deeply rooted in existing grievances that trigger inter-communal tensions and violence. The Sahel, Northern Africa, and the Horn of Africa have been the frontline regions experiencing intensified attacks that result in tragic loss of life, injuries, and the forced displacement of countless civilians. To combat this urgent threat, national governments must take decisive action by developing and implementing comprehensive strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism. There is a need to have a collective responsibility and joint programmes to combat terrorism and violent extremism through enhanced synergies and complementarities in regional approaches, such as efforts in the Lake Chad Basin, the Great Lakes region, the Mano River Basin and The Liptako-Gourma region. Cross-border cooperation and integrated approaches linking security, justice,

development and psychosocial support for communities are crucial. Thus, there is a need to increase early-warning and information-sharing initiatives among national authorities, which is essential for early response and for effectively tracking the movement of armed groups, including terrorist and extremist groups. The operationalisation of the PSC subcommittee on counterterrorism as a mechanism to follow up strategic initiatives should also work with the UN PBC. Moreover, empowering communities and local government structures to engage in violence prevention, such as those encapsulated in the AU's Regional Stabilisation Strategy for the Lake Chad Basin Commission is vital. The resilient framework can help address immediate security challenges and foster lasting peace and stability by integrating these efforts into broader capacity-building initiatives.

6.7. Pillar seven (climate-resilient peace and security)

Given Africa's vulnerability to climate change, its integration into peace and security frameworks is vital for sustainable development and stability. Climate change compounds existing vulnerabilities, increasing developmental challenges and the capacity to address challenges within peacebuilding efforts. The AU and RECs have declared environmental sustainability and climate change a key priority through the development of a Common African Position on Climate Peace and Security (CAP on CPS). The CAP on CPS, which focuses on prioritising adaptation, calls for reducing emissions by developed countries, enhancing the means of implementation, including the scaling up of financial resources, capacity building, and transfer of technology towards supporting Africa's needs; supporting early-warning systems; supporting indigenous technologies; and supporting climate-resilient infrastructure and establishing climate centres. This is a step in the right direction but should include how to manage and tackle this crisis in the stabilisation context. Therefore, peacebuilding initiatives can strengthen the capacity of communities to adapt to climate change and climate risks (Tchie and Brodtkorb, 2025). Thus, there is a greater need for AU, UN and RECs to work together to address the consequences of climate change and put in place adaptation and mitigation measures across the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus.

6.8. Pillar eight (local peacebuilding actors through deeper political consolidation)

Local peacebuilding is vital for fostering durable and sustainable peace in post-conflict communities. To effectively grasp the needs of a population as they perceive them, engaging in a meaningful and inclusive process is crucial to understanding their lived experiences. Only through this comprehensive understanding can governing structures cultivate bottom-up, truly locally owned and driven initiatives rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all set of externally imposed objectives. This is imperative for meaningful and lasting change (Tchie, 2025). Thus, there is a need to support local actors, local approaches to governance and communities through local peacebuilding efforts and national peace infrastructures for durable and sustainable peace, especially in countries emerging from political or armed conflicts. Finally, it should also provide and support the capacity building of diverse and local peacebuilders.

6.9. Pillar nine (adaptive stabilisation and recovery)

Over two decades, the AU – complemented by RECs/RMs – has conducted activities conceptually viewed as African-led stabilisation efforts. These efforts intended to stabilise states and the context in which a state(s) may find themselves in (Tchie, 2025). Consequently, African-led stabilisation efforts helped to shape the AU peace-enforcement efforts in Somalia, the AU Regional Stabilisation Strategy for the Lake Chad Basin Region with support from the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Southern African Development Community missions to Lesotho and Mozambique, among others. In this regard, it is important to emphasise coordination between international and regional bodies working on disarmament and peacebuilding and how both can contribute to conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustainable peace.

6.10. Pillar ten (disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration and security sector reform practices)

Furthermore, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR) processes must be nationally owned, formulating comprehensive national DDR strategies that ensure conflict-sensitive and context-specific implementation. Through the enhancement of national capacities in implementing DDR, Africa is increasingly taking charge of its peace and security (OECD, 2007). The AU has also supported states in SSR processes using the AU

Policy Framework on SSR. These efforts reflect the AU's key role and partnership in stabilisation efforts and the AU's ongoing commitment to supporting African states' journeys towards peace, stability and prosperity through security, governance and stabilisation activities (Tadesse, 2007). Moreover, adjusting for the complexity ensures it is graduated and multidimensional.

6.11. Pillar eleven (promotion of the peace–security–development nexus)

Siloed interventions by different actors have not effectively addressed the root causes of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, particularly concerning socio-economic development under the AU's policy on PCRD (AU, 2024b). It is crucial to advance holistic approaches to the peace–security–development (PSD) nexus that align with the peacebuilding and PCRD policies. The alignment is essential for fostering sustainable peace and development in post-conflict settings. To achieve this, it is important to clarify the PSD nexus and implement it through a coherent understanding of its objectives. Programming must be tailored to meet Africa's unique needs. Local ownership of approaches and flexible funding mechanisms are vital for success, alongside private-sector investment to promote collaboration and achieve sustainable, context-sensitive outcomes (Asuamah Yeboah, 2024).

6.12. Pillar twelve (sustained finance for peacebuilding)

Despite recognising peacebuilding as a critical investment, funding is often short-term, unpredictable and insufficient for addressing long-term needs. Over and beyond existing financing mechanisms such as the UN Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF) and the AU Peace Fund, there is a need to explore innovative financing mechanisms, including private-sector engagement, use of peace bonds, income from natural resources and allocation of funds from national budgets to peacebuilding activities to ensure predictable resources for peacebuilding initiatives (Chen, 2021). The AU is strengthening the AU Peace Fund to support peacebuilding efforts in member states. The technical support to member states emerging from conflicts is crucial to support and complement initiatives such as Agenda 2063. To maximise the impact of joint activities organised by the AU Commission, its PCRD centre and the UN PBSO, they must be backed by funding from the UN Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF). Thus, there is a need to have a strategic technical mechanism that can empower collaborative initiatives, ensuring they directly address the AU and UN's shared priorities.

6.13. Pillar thirteen (responding to emerging threats through strengthening coherence)

Integrating emerging threats is crucial to keeping peacebuilding strategies relevant. Geopolitical shifts, environmental disasters (including climate change), cybersecurity, new technologies (such as biotechnology), pandemics, transnational crimes, migrant smuggling, and forced displacement, among others, demand proactive prevention, mitigation and adaptation through restoring trust in global institutions, revitalising multilateralism, capacity building, digital learning and targeted financing. Peacebuilding strategies should be factored into forward-looking approaches. Greater coherence among the UN, the AU, RECs, RMs, civil society and donors is needed to enhance collective impact. More targeted engagement with clear outcomes, monitoring mechanisms and mutual accountability can ensure better coordination among these actors. Thus, consideration should be given to developing clear frameworks to align, as appropriate, the UN, AU, RECs and donors' efforts to reduce fragmentation and enhance the impact derived from peacebuilding interventions. Developing joint working groups and information-sharing platforms, where they do not exist, would help streamline and enhance peacebuilding initiatives among the key actors.

7. Conclusion

The paper provided a summary of the AU peacebuilding efforts. While on paper, the AU's peacebuilding tools are comprehensive, the tools used to further these efforts have rested mostly on the push by the AU PSC through directives. More practical efforts are needed to empower Africa-led peacebuilding initiatives and tools for the current time and context in which the AU in particular and the African continent in general exist. As a result, the paper argued that while the evolution of the AU PSO has allowed the AU to operate in a stabilisation context, peacebuilding tools have not seen a similar evolutionary development but have led to an underdevelopment of peacebuilding efforts. As a result, more efforts must be made to allow the AU to develop its peacebuilding efforts, which can connect with local solutions and harness the resilience of African communities to create a more peaceful and harmonious future. To pivot the AU's strategic role in peacebuilding, the paper argued for a new approach that adopts a more flexible framework to support better options for appreciating the interconnected and intertwined nature of insecurity. Consequently, the paper recommended a rethink of how states respond to peacebuilding efforts, drawing on adaptive and regional integration

frameworks that allow for a context-specific approach across various multifaceted layers. Ultimately, the paper provided 13 pillars of consideration that can complement and harmonise with existing AU policies for how the regional organisation tackles peacebuilding challenges from a holistic perspective.

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