



Gateways for Peace 2021

EU-South Africa Partnership for Peace & Security



POLICY BRIEF NO 1 / November 2021

Creating sustainable peace: evidence from the African Union

Ulf Engel, Institute
of African Studies,
Leipzig University

IN JANUARY 1993, the UN Security Council invited the newly appointed UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to produce a report on how, in a post-Cold War setting, the UN could strengthen its capacity for preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping. The report, entitled *An Agenda for Peace*, was released in June the same year. Amid 'new wars' in Somalia, Liberia and Sierra Leone but also in the Balkans, it outlined four 'areas of action' for achieving and maintaining sustainable peace in the post-Cold War world: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping, and post-conflict peacebuilding (UNSG 1992 §20). Noting that these areas were closely interrelated, it described them as follows:

- * *Preventive diplomacy* involved action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occurred.
- * *Peacemaking* involved action to bring hostile parties to agreement, essentially through peaceful means such as those foreseen in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations.
- * *Peace-keeping* involved the deployment of a UN presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all the parties concerned, normally involving UN military and/or police personnel and frequently civilians as well.
- * *Post-conflict peacebuilding* involved action to identify and support structures that would strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict.

Preventive diplomacy sought to resolve disputes before violence broke out; peacemaking and peacekeeping were required to halt conflicts and preserve peace once this was attained. If successful, the report said, they would strengthened the opportunity for post-conflict peacebuilding, which could prevent the recurrence of violence. It added that these four areas for action, taken together, and carried out with the backing of all Members, offered a 'coherent contribution towards securing peace in the spirit of the Charter'.

Boutros-Ghali's successor, Kofi Annan, consolidated these approaches by integrating them into a 'culture of prevention'. On this basis, the UNSC reiterated in August 2001 that 'early warning, preventive diplomacy, preventive deployment, preventive disarmament and post-conflict peacebuilding are interdependent and complementary components of a comprehensive conflict prevention strategy' (UNSC 2001).

Published by
Gateways4Peace
A programme of the
Delegation of the European
Union to South Africa
27 George Storrar Drive
Groenkloof 0181
Pretoria, South Africa

All rights reserved. The
views of the author do not
necessarily represent those
of the EU. Extracts may
be quoted, provided the
author and source are fully
acknowledged.

Creating sustainable peace: evidence from the African Union

Internationally, a conceptual distinction was established between short-term measures primarily directed at the proximate causes of conflict (i.e., preventive peace-making – including preventive diplomacy, humanitarian action and deployment), and long-term measures designed to address the structural causes of conflict (preventive peacebuilding, disarmament and development).

Key assumptions about and approaches to conflict prevention

The appeal of conflict prevention is based on the simple assumption that the costs of intervention could be substantially lowered by earlier and/or better planned preventive action.

(This also presupposes that conflicts can be prevented in the first place, and relevant role players know how this could be done). Essentially, the strong leaning towards conflict prevention in Agenda for Peace marks a rediscovery of some of the UN's roots (after all, conflict prevention is one of its founding missions). Yet operationalising conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy requires well formulated policies, efficient institutionalisation, and an effective set of practices.

The appeal of conflict prevention is based on the simple assumption that the costs of intervention could be substantially lowered by earlier and/or better planned preventive action

This Policy Brief focuses on the experience of the African Union in respect of building peace and security. The overall policy agenda is laid down in a Solemn Declaration adopted on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Organisation of African Unity/African Union on 25 May 2013, in which African heads of state and government pledge 'not to bequeath the burden of conflict to the next generation of Africans, and undertake to end all wars in Africa by 2020' (AU 2013a: SE).

To this end, they undertook, among other things, to address the root causes of conflicts, including economic and social disparities; eradicate recurrent and address emerging sources of conflict; and promote the agenda of conflict prevention, peacemaking, peace support, national reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction and development through the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

The APSA involves the introduction of a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) and various preventive diplomacy tools, notably a Panel of the Wise, and the capacity to despatch Special Envoys of the Chairperson of the AU Commission to sites of conflict. The immediate focus has always been on direct prevention. However, the popular uprisings in North Africa in 2011 also triggered a debate about structural, longer-term conflict prevention. In this respect the notion of 'structural stability' has become important. This goes back to discussions in the EU Commission in 1996 (EUC 1996, 2001), and has since resurfaced quite regularly.

Structural stability denotes a situation in which societies are able to cope with severe stress (political, economic, social, environmental) without resorting to violent conflict. Structural prevention comprises measures to address the structural/root causes of violent conflict. Inter alia, these should support the balancing of political, economic, social and cultural opportunities among all segments of society; contribute to the strengthening of democratic legitimacy, effective governance, and the peaceful conciliation of group interests; and bridging dividing lines among different segments of society.

Creating sustainable peace: evidence from the African Union

In 2015 the AU adopted a Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework (African Union 2013b) to bring together its various instruments in this respect. To operationalise the framework, Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessments (CSVRA) and Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategies (CSVMS) were developed (AU 2018). As a voluntary process, and technically comparable to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the CSVRAs are designed to facilitate the identification of a country's structural vulnerability to conflict at an early stage, with a special emphasis on areas that could become relevant drivers of violent conflict: (1) socio-economic development; (2) good governance, the rule of law, democracy and human rights; (3) the security sector; (4) the environment and climate change; (5) gender and youth; (6) post-conflict peacebuilding; and (7) transitional justice and reconciliation.

Early warning and conflict prevention was initially supported by implementation road maps and close interaction between the AU Commission and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

What has worked and what hasn't

Early warning and conflict prevention was initially supported by implementation road maps and close interaction between the AU Commission and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The relevant institutions began to operate in the early 2010s, and various practices have been developed since then. CEWS produces outputs that help the Chairperson of the AU Commission 'to advise the Peace and Security Council [PSC] on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security in Africa, and recommend the best course of action' (AU 2002: §12[5]). Besides other important AU early warning structures, such as the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA), CEWS briefs and provides horizon scanning to the PSC on a regular basis. The 2021 merger of the Peace and Security Department and Political Affairs Department into the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) was a setback for CEWS: institutionally, it literally disappeared from the AU's organogram, and had to be carefully reassembled around its various practices.

There is considerable harmonisation between the AU and RECs, especially the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC). This cooperation is based on a 2008 Memorandum of Understanding (AU 2008) which is currently up for renewal. It was supported by the EU's African Peace Facility (APF 2004–2020) whose funding of activities by RECs had to be channelled through the AUC Commission. Over the years, an important role in early warning has been defined for civil society organisations (mainly the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, or WANEP, but more recently also in East Africa and on the Horn). Early warning practices are now becoming integrated into Regional Infrastructures for Peace (RI4P) and their national components (NI4P).

Preventive diplomacy and mediation have a more chequered record. The Panel of the Wise was only operationalised in November 2007 when five eminent African personalities were appointed for the first time (for a three-year, one-time renewable period of office). The first two panels made good use of their mandate and pushed the debates on election-related disputes and political violence, the fight against impunity, the vulnerabilities of women and children in armed conflict, and political governance (see Gomes Porto and Ngandu 2015). But

Creating sustainable peace: evidence from the African Union

then the Panel became politically sidelined and lost its status as an independent pillar of the APSA that can basically pronounce itself on any matter related to peace and security.

In April 2013 the Panel together with the RECs created an important vertical umbrella, the Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise). However, due to the decentralised approach and a lack of administrative and financial capacities, PanWise soon became dormant. A more successful approach was followed in December 2016 when the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa) was started. It certainly enjoyed the full support of the donor community. However, its operationalisation and the deployment of FemWise-Africa members in ongoing mediation remains a challenge.

Building conflict prevention capacities at the AU has been a cumbersome process, in respect of early warning as well as preventive diplomacy

In addition, the AUC Chairperson has appointed numerous special envoys and high representatives. Initially, special envoys were appointed to deal with conflicts in within single AU member states; for instance, in 2008 the former South African president Thabo Mbeki was appointed as chairperson of the High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan and South Sudan (AUHIP). However, in recognition of the changing nature of violent conflict on the continent, increasingly cross-cutting appointments have been made. This includes appointees for Mali and the Sahel, the Great Lakes Region, The Horn of Africa, or for Women, Children and Armed Conflicts. In general, most special envoys do not enjoy a budget of their own, or a substantial staff endowment. However, they are assisted by a Mediation Support Unit (MSU) which is located in PAPS and supported by the UN's own MSU, as well as organisations such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (Geneva) and the Crisis Management Initiative (Helsinki). Operationalisation of the AU MSU is a work in progress.

Lessons learnt

Building conflict prevention capacities at the AU has been a cumbersome process, in respect of early warning as well as preventive diplomacy. However, there are strong signs of an incremental process of institutionalisation and professionalisation. This is partly the result of systematic programming and sound change management, including developing and implementing the APSA Roadmap 2016–2020 (AU 2016). Despite the many setbacks, policy inconsistencies and poor institutionalisation of some RECs, the AU, and by extension the RECs, matter, and can make a difference.

Peace and security on the continent remains a major challenge. Most of the time, the AU (and RECs) are in a fire-fighting mode that leaves little room for a genuine focus on structural conflict prevention. The most important variable for successful conflict prevention remains the commitment of AU member states to shared values, or the lack thereof. One policy field where this can be seen is unconstitutional changes of government (including coups d'état). On the one hand, the continental body has developed a clear normative position on this question; on the other, some member states are not inclined to domesticate the relevant legal frameworks, such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007) or the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development (2014). Second, political leadership of the AU and the Commission PAPS remains a key variable.

Creating sustainable peace: evidence from the African Union

On the downside, the AU is still financially heavily dependent on its international partners. The financial reform of the Union has started, but has not yet yielded the financial room needed to manoeuvre and secure stable finances that would allow it to implement all relevant policies. Again, the commitment of member states is crucial – some member states do not pay, some do not pay in time, and some only partly pay their dues.

The AU's strategic partnerships with the UN and EU, which have been developed since 2007, are extremely important in terms of capacity-building and addressing peace and security challenges in a coherent way.

What can SA and the EU do differently?

Under the 2006 Strategic Partnership (COM 2006: 347) and the 2007 Joint Action Plan (9650/07), the South African government and the EU should focus on the following mid- to long-term aims to promote conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy in the Southern African region and beyond:

- * Develop commonalities in the strategic partnership between the EU and South Africa, and identify connectors around conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy;
- * Assist SADC member states in ratifying and domesticating AU legal instruments on governance, peace, and security as well as relevant SADC Protocols;
- * Engage SADC member states on the compliance mechanism of the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), particularly the obligation to produce a report on the domestication of its principles every two years;
- * Systematically invest in the development of multilateral approaches to fostering structural conflict prevention (possibly in partnership with UNECA and the AfDB);
- * Promote the APRM beyond current voluntary signatories,¹ work towards a renewal of the commitment of signatories to produce relevant reports in time,² and organise the country consultations in an inclusive manner;
- * Organise a lessons learnt and best practice exercise on the use of the APRM in the SADC region;
- * Encourage SADC member states to join the AU voluntary process of assessing their conflict potential as well as their resilience as outlined in the Country Structural Conflict and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA) tool;
- * Once Zambia has concluded this process as the first volunteer in the SADC region, mobilise additional resources for the implementation of Zambia's Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategy (CSVMS);
- * Support the national and regional action plans under the women, peace and security agenda outlined in UNSC resolution 1325 (2000) and the many AU resolutions adopted since then, to counter sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) but also to promote women in all phases and at all levels (from track 1 to track 3) of conflict mediation and resolution.

The AU's strategic partnerships with the UN and EU, which have been developed since 2007, are extremely important in terms of capacity-building and addressing peace and security challenges in a coherent way

Creating sustainable peace: evidence from the African Union

- * Develop a related agenda for the youth;
- * Support the SADC Mediation Support Unit (MSU);
- * Against the backdrop of the experience with the African Peace Facility (2004–2020), increase EU funding under the new European Peace Facility for conflict prevention, preventive diplomacy and early warning relative to other funding priorities.

Endnotes

1 SADC member states that have not yet signed up for the APRM are Botswana, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Madagascar, Seychelles and Zimbabwe.

2 The APRM signatories that have not yet tabled a progress report are Angola, Malawi, Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia, and other reports are overdue.

References

- African Union (AU). 2002. Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council. Durban.
- _____. 2008. Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security between the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities and the Coordinating Mechanisms of the Regional Standby Brigades of Eastern Africa and Northern Africa. Addis Ababa.
- _____. 2013a. 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration. Addis Ababa.
- _____. 2013b. Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework. Addis Ababa.
- _____. 2014. African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development. Addis Ababa.
- _____. 2016. African Peace and Security Architecture. APSA Roadmap 2016–2020. Addis Ababa.
- _____. 2018a. Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework. Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessments (CSVRA), and Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategies (CSVMS). Addis Ababa.
- _____. 2018b. Conflict Prevention and Early Warning. Addis Ababa: AUC Peace and Security Department.
- Berghof Foundation. 2021. *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*. Berlin. At <https://berghof-foundation.org/library/berghof-handbook-for-conflict-transformation>
- EU Commission (EUC). 1996. The European Union and the Issues of Conflicts in Africa: Peace-building, conflict prevention and beyond. Brussels. 6 March. SEC (96) 332.
- _____. 2001. Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention. Brussels. 11 April. COM (2001) 211.
- Gomes Porto, João and Kapinga Yvette Ngandu. 2015. *The African Union's Panel of the Wise: A concise history*. Durban: The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes.
- Karbo, Tony and Kudrat Virk (eds). 2018. *The Palgrave Handbook of Peacebuilding in Africa*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Koops, Joachim A, Thierry Tardy, Norrie MacQueen and Paul D Williams (eds). 2015. *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Creating sustainable peace: evidence from the African Union

United Nations Security Council (UNSC). 2001. Resolution on the prevention of armed conflict, adopted at the 4360th UNSC meeting, 30 August (UN/S/RES 1366).

United National Secretary-General (UNSG). 1992. *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping*. New York: United Nations, 17 June (A/47/277, S/24111).

_____. 1994. *An Agenda for Development*. New York: United Nations. 6 May (A/48/935).

_____. 1995. *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace*. New York: United Nations. 25 January (A/50/60, S/1995/1).

_____. 1996. *An Agenda for Democratisation*. New York: United Nations, 20 December (A/51/761).

_____. 2011. *Preventive Diplomacy: Delivering Results*. Report of the Secretary-General. New York: United Nations, 26 August (S/2011/552).

About the author

Ulf Engel is Professor of Politics in Africa at the Institute of African Studies, Leipzig University (Germany). He is also a visiting professor at the Institute for Peace and Security Studies at Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia) and a professor extraordinary in the Department of Political Science at Stellenbosch University (South Africa). From 2006 to 2019, he advised the AU Peace and Security Department in the fields of conflict prevention, early warning and preventive diplomacy.