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A Critical Review of IGAD'S Integration Agenda



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By Matundura Nyambunde

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Abstract

The pursuit of regional integration in Africa emerged shortly after independence, with African states adopting Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as building blocks toward continental unity. This article critically reviews the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) at 40 years, examining its evolution from a drought-focused organisation into a broader regional institution in the Greater Horn of Africa. The article adopts a qualitative research approach based on secondary data, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, institutional reports, treaties, and credible online sources. Anchored in the intergovernmentalism model, which prioritises state sovereignty, consensus decision-making,

and inter-state cooperation, the article contrasts IGAD's approach with the supranational model of the European Union. It argues that sovereignty concerns, weak enforcement mechanisms, and limited institutional autonomy have constrained deeper regional integration. Despite notable achievements in conflict mediation, particularly in South Sudan, drought resilience through the IGAD Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI), environmental governance, and advancing the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, IGAD remains among the least progressive RECs in Africa. Persistent challenges include political instability, membership volatility, limited market integration, donor dependence, weak institutional architecture, and the absence of a strong shared regional identity. The article recommends strengthening economic integration through a Free Trade Area and customs union, deepening regional mobility, reforming institutional structures, enhancing political commitment, and promoting social cohesion to bridge the gap between IGAD's ambitions and implementation realities.

Introduction

The call for integration on the African continent began soon after countries gained their independence. Leading this clarion call was Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. While both leaders advocated for the political unity of the African continent, Kwame Nkrumah called for the immediate unification of Africa while Mwalimu Nyerere advocated for the gradual unification of Africa (Mazrui, 1967; Qobo, 2007). The Organisation of African Unity, the premier organisation tasked with coordination of African integration, through the Assembly of Heads of State and Government opted for the latter and this led to creation of different regional economic communities within Africa. Currently, there are eight RECs in Africa that include the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Regional integration has been defined as the coming together of countries within one region with the aim of overcoming barriers and engaging in trade and creating a common market (Kimbugwe et al., 2012, p.

11). In Africa, regional integration has been touted as an effective way of addressing the challenges of having small national markets with the 54 different states that make up the continent. Accordingly, regional integration in Africa can be a force for good and contribute to peace and security, strengthen economic integration through the establishment of free trade areas and create an enabling environment where the private sector can develop. Spillover effects of regional integration include development of joint infrastructure projects between member states and strengthening of the region's interaction with other regions in the world (Nwokedi & Adie, 2019, p. 3).

The Evolution of IGAD

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is a Regional Economic Community within the African Economic Community framework, serving the Greater Horn of Africa. Established in 1986 as the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) and reconstituted in 1996, IGAD has evolved from a drought-focused institution into a broader regional economic community. The original members of IGAD included Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. Eritrea joined in 1993 and South Sudan joined in 2011. The mandate and objectives of IGAD have evolved over time and expanded to other areas of co-operation including economic co-operation, political and security collaboration and developmental integration.

The region covers an area of about 5.2 million square kilometres and the citizens of the member states of IGAD make up a population of over 280 million people (IGAD, 2024a). The IGAD region is characterised by significant socio-cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity, which continues to shape its integration trajectory. According to the African Multidimensional Regional Integration Index (AMRII), IGAD remains one of the least progressive regional economic communities in Africa (Africa Visa Openness, 2025).

Institutional Framework

Article 7 of the Agreement Establishing the Intergovernmental Authority on Development spells out the core mandate of IGAD and this includes strengthening peace and security frameworks, coordinating responses to forced displacement and public health emergencies, promoting environmental governance and climate resilience and facilitating regional integration through

cross-border trade and infrastructure. The institutional framework of IGAD comprises the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, the Council of Ministers, the Committee of Ambassadors and the Secretariat. The Assembly of Heads of State and Government remains the supreme decision-making organ of IGAD and determines the objectives and programmes for IGAD. Co-operation within IGAD is coordinated by the Secretariat based in Djibouti and complemented by other specialised bodies including IGAD Drought Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDRSI), the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanisms (CEWARN), the IGAD Security Sector Programme (ISSP) and the IGAD Climate Prediction and Application Centre (ICPAC).

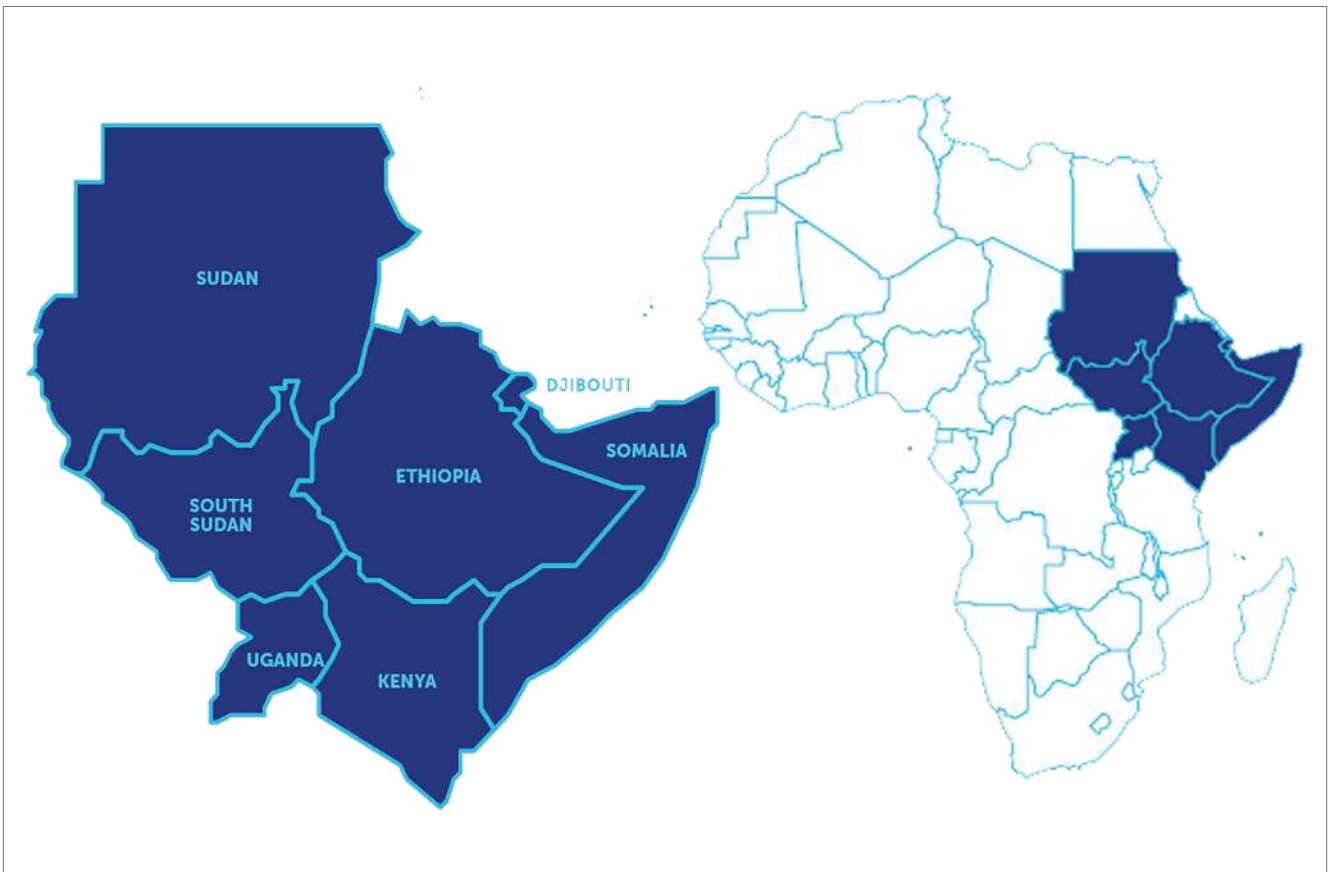
Theoretical Framework:

Intergovernmentalism versus Supranationalism

The operational models of most regional economic communities in Africa follow the intergovernmentalism model. Under this model, governments collaborate on an equal footing and decision-making requires the consensus of the Heads of State and Government. This not only applies to IGAD but also applies to

the East African Community, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) among other regional economic communities in Africa. The intergovernmentalism model is premised on the rationale that national governments and state leaders determine and direct integration outcomes (Adino & Abebe, 2025).

The intergovernmentalism model of integration faces setbacks since it naturally limits co-operation and at times slows down integration efforts as states place their sovereign interests first and the integration agenda is left at the periphery. By contrast, the European Union represents a supranational model in which member states delegate limited sovereign authority to regional institutions. The ECJ in the case of *Van Gend en Loos v. Nederlandse Administratie der Belastingen*, held that the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community was a sovereign legal order and had direct application in national law and the implications were that the Treaty took precedence over national law. In the place of a supranational entity and binding organs such as regional courts and an independent parliament, the decisions of these institutions are binding thereby shaping the



Map of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Member States—Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda (Photo Credit: UNCDF)

“Since its establishment, IGAD has actively implemented various programmes and projects aimed at addressing the root causes of drought, combating desertification, addressing land degradation, fostering resilience and increasing investments particularly in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs)

regional agenda (Goldmann, 2020). Sovereignty concerns based on the adopted model of co-operation continue to present a major hurdle in integration efforts across most regional economic communities in Africa and IGAD is not an exception.

Notable Successes and Milestones

Since its establishment in 1986, and its revitalization in 1996, IGAD has recorded notable gains particularly in addressing drought and food security, peace, security and conflict mediation, and movement of persons.

Drought and Food Security

Climate change and climate shocks also continue to be a persistent challenge within the region. Considering 70 – 75% of the land in the region is arid to semi-arid, droughts and floods continue to threaten livelihoods. Resource conflicts continue to persist over land, water and grazing rights that fuel local disputes in the region. The larger part of the IGAD region is found in an arid and semi-arid region in the Horn of Africa.

Since its establishment, IGAD has actively implemented various programmes and projects aimed at addressing the root causes of drought, combating desertification, addressing land degradation, fostering resilience and increasing investments particularly in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). These endeavours touching on agriculture and environment include the IGAD Inland Water Resources Management Programme, the IGAD Biodiversity Management Programme, the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme, the Land Governance Programme and the IGAD Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI). IGAD is also actively engaged in building operations to address drought and resilience, climate-smart agriculture through the IGAD Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (2025–

2034). IGAD has also undertaken to boost cross-border agricultural trade and regulating pastoralist movements across borders through the adoption of the Protocol on Transhumance that sets out to facilitate the safe and orderly cross-border mobility for pastoralists and their livestock to access water and pasture.

Peace, Security and Conflict Mediation

IGAD has also participated in regional peace efforts within the Horn of Africa particularly in South Sudan. IGAD mediated the South Sudan conflict culminating in the Comprehensive Agreement (2005) and the Agreement on the resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) and the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS). This was a key milestone for regional peace efforts and arguably a win for African-led diplomacy. By drawing on its familiarity with the region and political pragmatism, IGAD spearheaded a process that helped bring to an end one of the continent’s deadliest civil wars (Magara, 2025).

IGAD has successfully mediated several conflicts in the region and this remains the organisation’s key achievements to date. However, IGAD has not been successful in mediation of some conflicts such as the ongoing conflict in Sudan that began in April 2023. The impasse in mediating and resolving this conflict has negative consequences on the security, regional integration and economic stability of the region.

Movement of Persons, Migration and Refugees

In 2020, IGAD proposed the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons. The Protocol was adopted in 2021. To date, 5 Member States have signed the Protocol including the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Republic of Sudan, the Republic of South Sudan, the Republic of Kenya and the Republic of Uganda (Djama, 2024). The Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons provides a framework for the free movement of persons and progressive realisation of the rights of establishment and residence. The objective of this Protocol is to facilitate the implementation of the Agreement by providing for the progressive realization of free movement of persons, rights of establishment and residence in IGAD Member States.

In 2024, there were 5.4 million refugees and asylum seekers within the IGAD region (IGAD, 2024b). Uganda hosted approximately 1.8 million refugees, the largest

number in the region and in Africa in general. Member states in IGAD have endeavoured to co-operate with regards to refugee matters including through the Policy Framework on Refugee Protection (2023) aimed at harmonizing rights of refugees and their protection and documentation. IGAD also applies the Comprehensive Refugee Response Network. There are also direct forms of co-operation including workshops, the latest in Ethiopia discussed refugee rights to work and inclusion in national economies.

More recently, IGAD has proposed the introduction of a Single Visa Initiative aimed at enhancing regional mobility, economic development and tourism among member states. The initiative seeks to establish a unified digital system aimed at non-IGAD citizens visiting the region. Consequently, this will position IGAD as a competitive destination for international visitors and investors. The initiative is anchored in Article 7 and 13 (A) of IGAD's founding agreement, and the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons. The initiative also includes plans to introduce a Regional Identity Card (IRBIC) for IGAD citizens to facilitate movement of persons and particularly intends to benefit pastoralist and cross-border communities. Currently, IGAD's visa-free reciprocity score stands at 21 percent up from 14 percent in 2024 which is relatively low and continues to act as a barrier to regional integration and economic growth (Africa Visa Openness, 2025).

Trade, Tourism and Economic Co-operation

IGAD has also engaged in capacity building among member states to enhance access to markets for small scale producers and traders extending to those in the informal sector. The development of a Warehouse Receipt System (WRS) has also facilitated cross-border agricultural trade and improved financing for farmers across member states of IGAD. IGAD has also formulated a Sustainable Tourism Master Plan 2024 – 2034 that aspires to position the region as a competitive region in the world when it comes to tourism. The master plan aims at promoting economic growth, fostering sustainability, cultural preservation and environmental stewardship (Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2025).

Ongoing Challenges and Constraints

Ongoing challenges within IGAD include political instability among member states. The persistent conflicts in Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan and occasionally

Ethiopia and Eritrea undermine IGAD's peacebuilding capacity. IGAD has limited capacity due to limited funding and reliance on external partners. Consequently, IGAD faces constraints when it comes to implementing long-term strategies. Trust among member states of IGAD remains minimal and consequently this affects the political commitment and meeting of the obligations and mandate of the organisation.

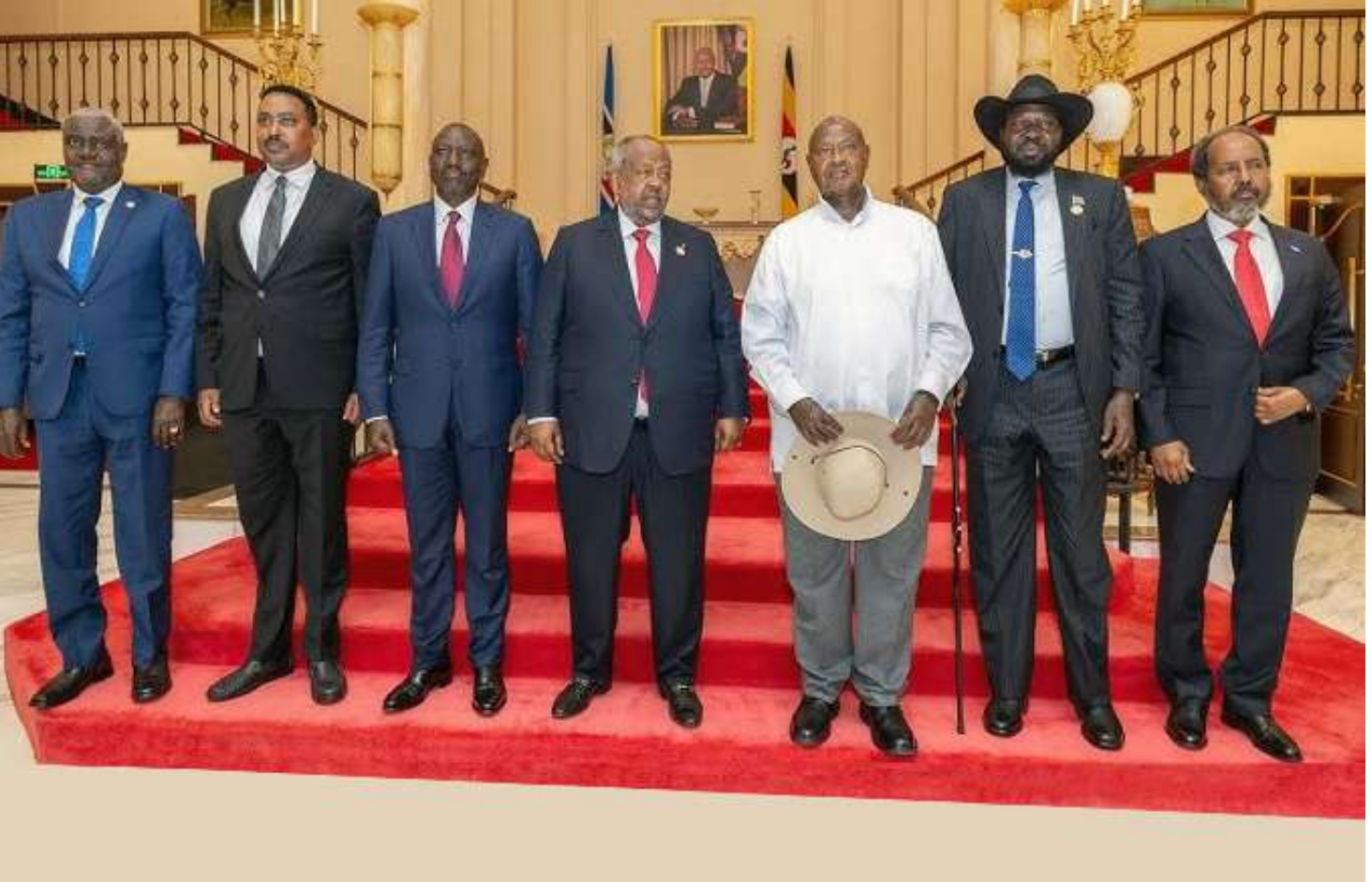
Critics have argued that IGAD remains overly state-centric and elite-driven, with limited mechanisms for citizen participation or private-sector inclusion. Dependence on foreign financing has also limited the ability of IGAD to be an autonomous and independent regional organisation. Reliance on funding from external donors means that the organisation has to abide by the rules laid out by the funding parties and consequently IGAD lacks self-reliance.

Security Focus versus Economic Integration

According to Weldesellassie (2011) peace, security and regional politics have been the main drive of IGAD and regional integration as a model is more recent. A focus on conflict and security as its major focus for the large part of the community's history has sabotaged strengthening regional economic development co-operation. This security-centric orientation is also reflected in citizens' perceptions of regional co-operation, thereby undermining broader integration efforts. For example, economic integration, say between Kenya and Somalia is rarely a focus of IGAD and the focus is mainly on the peace and security.

"Rethinking regional integration schemes in Africa and basing them on an outwardly-oriented approach aimed at integration into the global economy, is no longer an option for Africa. It is a necessity if economic progress is to be achieved, and if regional integration is to be meaningful." (Qobo, 2007, p. 7)

Naturally, trade brings people and countries together as the primary factor and therefore trade largely underpins regional integration (Qobo, 2007). The absence of economic benefits from IGAD has contributed to members withdrawing their membership unilaterally. In the presence of tangible economic benefits such as cross-border trade or belonging to a single economic monetary union, withdrawal of membership would come



IGAD Member States' Heads of State and senior officials pose for a group photo during the 42nd Extraordinary Session of the IGAD Assembly held in Entebbe, Uganda, on 19 January 2024. (Photo Credit: PCS)

with costs and consequently this guarantees long-term membership within the regional economic community. Scholars have noted that member states' dependence on trade taxes and customs duties has reinforced protectionist policies and constrained deeper market integration (Gaas, 2023).

In comparison to EAC and ECOWAS, IGAD does not have a free trade area (FTA) nor a customs union to ease trade barriers of intra-regional movement of goods, services and capital flows. Consequently, this reduces the volume of trade. Gaas (2023) has argued that member states of IGAD are also over-dependent on trade taxes and customs duties to fund their annual budgets and consequently member states have developed protectionist markets further hindering intra-regional trade.

Overlapping Membership in Multiple RECs

In the beginning, we reviewed how regional integration emerged in Africa. While there were diverging routes of embracing regional integration, the choice of RECs was adopted as opposed to immediate unification. Some arguments for this model were that regions start integrating and opening up while getting accustomed to each other as opposed to immediate unification that would lead to conflicts. It is to be remembered that in the

first two to three decades after any African states received their independence, there was continued conflicts in various regions.

However, having different regional economic communities has also led to overlapping membership. Member States in IGAD have overlapping memberships gaining benefits such as market and trade exchange and people-to-people exchanges. Four out of eight member states (Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan and Somalia) are in the East African Community. Kenya and Uganda have integrated more within the EAC as compared to IGAD.

Overlapping membership is a common feature among regional economic communities in Africa. Consequently, this makes it difficult to measure the effectiveness of regional integration on the continent. Membership of multiple RECs leads to difficulties in committing to objectives, multiple interests and generally a lack of a clear focus and alignment. The question posed is what metric would be used to measure success and outcomes of integration when a member state belongs to more than one economic community. For example, Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan are both members of IGAD and the East African Community (EAC). Somalia is the latest entrant of the EAC having officially joined the Community in 2022.

Membership Volatility

Commitment by Member States also remains fragmented as there are more active and willing member states than others. Political commitment and commitment of member states has been lacking. Sudan withdrew its membership in January 2024 citing overstepping by the organisation when IGAD placed Sudan's domestic crisis on the agenda of the 42nd summit. Sudan reactivated its membership in 2026 (Abdeen, 2026).

Eritrea withdrew its membership in 2007 and rejoined in June 2023 before withdrawing again in December 2025. More recently, Eritrea cited as a principal concern failure of the organisation to live up to its objectives and more often than not, IGAD had shown bias towards Ethiopia when it came to addressing the conflict between the two countries (The East African, 2026).

Membership within the bloc is also not strict in the spirit of meeting the ends of integration. Eritrea's withdrawal and Sudan's fluctuating participation highlight political divisions. While the justification for withdrawals should not be entirely dismissed, it is essential that the underlying principles of integration adhere to the spirit of co-operation, as unilateral withdrawals can undermine such mergers in the long term.

Institutional Gaps within IGAD's Legal Architecture

The institutional architecture of IGAD does not grant it executive or autonomous decision-making powers. Decision-making authority remains concentrated within intergovernmental political organs, limiting institutional autonomy. Consequently, this leaves the regional economic community lacking the capacity to be able to truly make any meaningful decisions. The institutional framework of IGAD is also lacking since the regional organisation lacks instruments to enforce regional agreements.

Structural inefficiency of the regional community remains one of the main challenges facing IGAD. IGAD further lacks instruments to assist member states that may fail. This is evident in the ongoing war in Sudan between the government forces and the RSF that has been going on for three years now. IGAD structural deficiency is underpinned by not having a legislative and enforcement arm and therefore members are reluctant to obey and domesticate rules and policies which leads to low morale and less commitment from member states (Weldesellassie, 2011).

There is much emphasis on the security arena while other areas of co-operation have not been formulated or thought through such as a legislative arm or creating legal infrastructure that manages disputes among member states nor the means to enforce the rules (Gaas, 2023).

A Common Identity

This commentary submits that regional integration efforts in IGAD still face hurdles because of the lack of a core identity that defines the respective regional economic community. While the organisation was formed in the backdrop of famine and drought, one can argue that identity formation still faces its unique challenges. The region is defined by differing histories, religion and languages. Member states of IGAD still maintain similarities, for example, all Member States except for Ethiopia experienced colonisation. In most countries, a significant part of the population are engaged in pastoralist farming.

This article argues that unlike the East African Community (EAC) which is brought together by language and culture (Swahili) or the Southern African Development Community (SADC) which is brought together by a unique history of member states collaborating to fight for their independence, the IGAD community still struggles to find commonality that would accelerate their integration.

The IGAD region is characterised by significant socio-cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity, which continues to shape its integration trajectory. According to the African Multidimensional Regional Integration Index (AMRII), IGAD remains one of the least progressive regional economic communities in Africa

... Ethiopia is a key member state to watch in the region as it continues to open up its economy and become a regional power. Holding the seat of the African Union, a diplomatic hub of Africa, Ethiopia's close co-operation with other regional powers in the globe such as BRICS positions Ethiopia as a key state and regional power in influencing policy direction within IGAD

Opportunities and Future Prospects

Despite these constraints, IGAD retains strategic opportunities for deeper integration. Market opportunities exist as Ethiopia opens up its economy. Somalia has also gained relative peace and calm in the last few years. Kenya and Ethiopia's economies lead in the region. Somalia's discovery of oil prospects and its enhanced co-operation with Turkey especially in defense, energy exploration, and infrastructure development presents opportunities for Somalia and the region in trade and stability within the region (TRT, 2021).

Over the next decade, Ethiopia is a key member state to watch in the region as it continues to open up its economy and become a regional power. Holding the seat of the African Union, a diplomatic hub of Africa, Ethiopia's close co-operation with other regional powers in the globe such as BRICS positions Ethiopia as a key state and regional power in influencing policy direction within IGAD. However, this won't come easy for Addis Ababa considering the regional power rivalries and historical mistrust between states.

In addition, Somalia in its post-conflict construction continues to gain stability while maintaining close co-operation with Turkey. Its long coastline and the possibility of discovering oil provides great opportunities not only for Somalia but the region. Based on the different existing asymmetries, it remains to be seen whether continued market integration between Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda and now Somalia under the auspices of

the East African Community will have an impact on trade and market dynamics of IGAD.

Conclusion

IGAD's principal paradox is that its strongest institutional legitimacy derives from peace and security interventions, yet this same security-centric orientation has delayed economic integration. While there are different economic communities within the African Union, overlapping membership has slowed down movement towards one direction. Different citizens have varied perceptions of regional integration and their objectives and consequently priorities and commitment differ. While the EAC for example has succeeded in areas mainly economic integration, IGAD has performed relatively well with regards to conflict management. This suggests that African RECs can benefit from greater inter-REC policy learning and institutional benchmarking. Yet, regional economic communities in Africa are not meant to be polarised but in the midst of all these differences, they ought to co-operate and work together. It is on this basis that recommendations have been made that IGAD learns from other RECs that have integrated better on the African continent such as the East African Community and the Economic Community of West African States ECOWAS who for example have thrived in areas such as market access and regional co-operation especially among the Heads of States and Government providing political commitment to the process.

However, more recently, the region has been gaining economic and political stability despite the intermittent fissures and disruptions, conversations and commitments on regional trade, opening up and economic integration have begun in earnest. External geopolitical partnerships continue to shape the strategic and developmental trajectory of the region. Still, the conversation needs to focus on adopting and enacting protocols on macroeconomic convergence, infrastructure development, industrial development, investment and regional information technology.

Recommendations

Strengthen Economic Integration

Economic integration provides a strong guarantee for integrating member states since benefits are tangible and immediate. It also facilitates people-to-people exchanges. Despite adopting policy resolutions on regional digital

trade solutions and cross-border agricultural trade signalling a shift towards macroeconomic convergence, IGAD ought to pay attention to policy considerations covering, industrial development, infrastructure development and investment and regional information technology. Adopting the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons signals opening up and working towards operationalising a free trade area (FTA) and a customs union. Establishing a free trade area will reduce the need of protectionist markets among member states. There is also need to follow up and implement the Protocol on Transhumance and the Protocol on Free Movement.

Deepen Free Movement and Regional Mobility

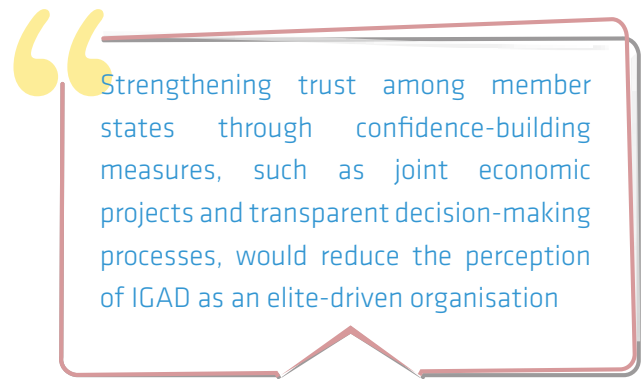
The Protocol on Free Movement of Persons holds significant promise to the region. There is need for the remaining Member States to sign and ratify it. Implementation of the Single Visa initiative by Member States will also enhance regional mobility, economic development and tourism. Introduction of the Regional Identity Card also needs to be fast-tracked to facilitate movement of persons especially among cross-border communities, pastoralists and commercial and business operators. Implementation of these measures will improve IGAD's low visa-free reciprocity score and open up the region to furthering integration and economic growth.

Reform Institutional Architecture

Structural inefficiency and institutional gaps emerged as one area where IGAD is struggling and that is leading in slowing down integration in the region. There is need to strengthen IGAD's institutional framework by addressing the RECs lack of autonomous decision-making powers and enforcement mechanisms. There is need to deliberate on making amendments to the founding agreement to accommodate a legislative arm, legal avenues of managing disputes among member states either through a regional court or tribunal and mechanisms of enforcing regional agreements.

Improve Political Commitment and Membership Stability

To address the persistent challenge of membership volatility and fragmented commitment, IGAD member



states should prioritise the development of stronger mechanisms for ensuring political accountability and long-term engagement. This could include the adoption of a binding political commitment protocol that outlines clear consequences for unilateral withdrawals or prolonged non-participation, alongside regular high-level political dialogue forums beyond the ordinary summits. Strengthening trust among member states through confidence-building measures, such as joint economic projects and transparent decision-making processes, would reduce the perception of IGAD as an elite-driven organisation. Greater ownership by member states, including increased domestic financial contributions, would also diminish overreliance on external donors and enhance the organisation's autonomy and credibility.

Build Regional Identity and Social Cohesion

A critical gap in IGAD's integration agenda remains the weak sense of shared regional identity among its citizens and governments. IGAD should invest in deliberate efforts to foster social cohesion through cultural diplomacy, people-to-people initiatives, and educational programmes that highlight common histories, challenges, and aspirations. Practical steps could include the promotion of intra-regional tourism packages, youth and sports exchange programmes, joint cultural festivals, and the integration of IGAD-focused content into national school curricula. By nurturing a collective regional consciousness — beyond the current focus on security and drought — IGAD can create the social foundation necessary for deeper integration, similar to the role played by Swahili language and shared anti-colonial history in the EAC and SADC respectively. This long-term investment in identity formation would complement economic and institutional reforms and help sustain political commitment.

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Too Many Peacemakers? Conflict fragmentation and the crisis of legitimacy in the M23 conflict mediation

By Carine Babikire Lobela

Abstract

This article examines the evolving dynamics of the M23 conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo through the lens of mediation fragmentation. While existing literature has largely focused on the proliferation of armed groups, this study shifts attention to a parallel yet underexplored phenomenon: the fragmentation of peace processes themselves. It argues that the current phase of the conflict represents a “multipolar mediation phase” characterized by the coexistence of overlapping and partially competing regional, continental, and international mediation initiatives, including the Nairobi and Luanda processes, African Union facilitation, and extra-continental engagements in Doha and Washington. Drawing on conflict analysis and peacebuilding theory, the article demonstrates how this proliferation of mediation tracks undermines coherence, weakens legitimacy, and creates opportunities for strategic behavior by conflict actors. It further highlights the marginalization of rule of law considerations within peace negotiations, where short-term stability often takes precedence over accountability, thereby reinforcing cycles of violence and impunity. Additionally, the study explores the externalization of peacebuilding, showing how the increasing involvement of global actors risks diluting local ownership and weakening regional institutional leadership. The article concludes that the central challenge in the M23 crisis is no longer the absence of mediation, but its fragmentation. It calls for the establishment of a coordinated mediation framework, greater inclusivity of local actors, and the integration of legal accountability into peace processes as essential conditions for sustainable peace in eastern DRC.

Introduction

The resurgence of the M23 rebellion in eastern DR Congo reflects not only the persistence of armed violence but also the transformation of contemporary conflict environments into highly complex and multi-layered systems. The crisis illustrates a familiar yet evolving pattern: a fragmented battlefield populated by a multiplicity of armed actors, intersecting local and regional interests and sustained external involvement (Stearns, 2012).

While much scholarly and policy attention has focused on the fragmentation of armed groups in eastern DR Congo, less attention has been paid to a parallel and equally consequential phenomenon which is the fragmentation of peace processes themselves. Today, mediation efforts addressing the M23 crisis are dispersed across multiple tracks regional, continental, and international ranging from the Nairobi Process led by the East African Community (EAC) to the Luanda Process under Angolan facilitation, as well as diplomatic engagements in global capitals such as Washington, Doha and now Montreux (Switzerland).

The proliferation of mediation initiatives raises a critical paradox; rather than reinforcing one another, these parallel processes risk generating institutional competition, weakening coherence, and undermining the legitimacy of peace efforts (de Coning, Saraiva, & Muto, 2023). As a result, actors within the conflict both state and non-state are able to strategically navigate between competing frameworks, thereby diluting accountability and complicating resolution. Then follow the conceptualization of the current stage of the conflict as the “*Multipolar mediation phase*”

This article argues that the M23 crisis is no longer defined solely by the fragmentation of violence, but increasingly by the fragmentation of peace architecture itself. It contends that without greater coordination, inclusivity, and a stronger emphasis on the rule of law, the multiplication of mediation initiatives risks entrenching instability rather than resolving it.



M23 fighters advance across eastern DRC, battling Congolese government forces and capturing the regional capitals of Goma in North Kivu and Bukavu in South Kivu. (Photo Credits: Luis Tato/AFP/Getty Images)

Genealogy of the M23 conflict: From a conventional insurgency to a multipolar mediation

The evolution of the M23 conflict since 2012 reflects a broader transformation in the nature of armed conflict and peacebuilding in the Great Lakes region. What began as a relatively structured insurgency has evolved into a complex crisis marked not only by the proliferation of armed actors, but also by the multiplication of mediation frameworks and political interlocutors at regional and international levels.

a. Phase I (2012–2013): The Conventional insurgency and coordinated regional response

The M23 rebellion emerged in April 2012 under the presidency of Joseph Kabila, when former members of the *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (National Congress for the Defence of the People) (CNDP), including key figures such as Bosco Ntaganda and later Sultani Makenga, defected from the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC) the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo FARDC. The movement justified its insurgency by citing the Congolese government's failure to fully implement the 23 March 2009 peace agreement (Human Rights Watch, 2012).

This phase was marked by relatively identifiable chains of command and a clear escalation trajectory, culminating in the capture of Goma in November 2012 (UN Security Council, 2013). At the regional level, the crisis quickly drew in neighboring states, notably Rwanda with President Paul Kagame and Uganda with President Yoweri Museveni, both of whom were repeatedly accused by UN experts of supporting the rebellion allegations they denied (UN Group of Expert on DRC, 2012).

In response, relatively coherent mediation architecture emerged. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), chaired at key moments by Yoweri Museveni, played a central convening role (ICGLR, 2013). Parallel efforts were supported by the African Union under the leadership of the South African Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

At the global level, the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and his Special Envoy Mary Robinson were instrumental in facilitating negotiations that culminated in the 2013 Addis Ababa Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. Key regional signatories included Jakaya Kikwete and Jacob Zuma, reflecting broader regional commitment. Simultaneously, military efforts were coordinated through MONUSCO, led by Force Commander Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, whose leadership of the Force Intervention Brigade

(FIB) marked a decisive shift toward offensive peace enforcement (African Union, 2013).

The convergence of diplomatic and military strategies backed by relatively aligned regional and international leadership ultimately led to the defeat of M23 in late 2013. This phase can therefore be understood as a centralized and coordinated response to a conventional insurgency, where mediation authority, while multi-layered, remained broadly coherent.

b. Phase II (2021–present): The multipolar mediation phase

The resurgence of M23 in late 2021, under the presidency of Félix Tshisekedi, marks the beginning of a fundamentally different phase. While remnants of the original leadership persisted, the movement re-emerged within a far more fragmented political and security environment (UN Group of Experts, 2022).

At the regional level, tensions between the DRC and Rwanda intensified with Kinshasa accusing Kigali of renewed support to M23. Uganda simultaneously deepened its military presence in eastern DRC through bilateral arrangements, while the President of Burundi, Évariste Ndayishimiye, also deployed troops in the region (Ebuteli, 2024). Unlike the earlier phase, mediation efforts became dispersed across multiple leadership centers.

The genealogy of the M23 conflict demonstrates that while the nature of armed violence has evolved, the architecture of peace has evolved too. The transition from a relatively coordinated mediation framework in 2012–2013 to a fragmented, multipolar system today underscores a central challenge: the governance of mediation itself. Understanding who mediates, how, and under what authority is no longer a secondary question it is central to the prospects for sustainable peace in eastern DRC.

A multiplicity of mediation tracks: from complementarity to competition

The contemporary response to the M23 crisis is defined not by the absence of mediation, but by its proliferation. Unlike earlier phases of the conflict, where diplomatic efforts were relatively coordinated, the current phase marked by the resurgence of M23 since late 2021 has generated a dense constellation of mediation initiatives operating simultaneously across regional, continental, and global levels. While these processes are often framed

as complementary, their coexistence without effective coordination has progressively transformed the peace architecture into a competitive and multipolar arena.

a. Continental and regional tracks: Nairobi, Luanda and Lomé facilitation

At the regional level, the Nairobi Process, launched in April 2022 under the East African Community (EAC), represents one of the primary mediation frameworks. Facilitated by Uhuru Kenyatta, former President of Kenya, the process aimed to engage non-state armed groups through dialogue and to promote disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (East African Community, 2022).

However, the M23 itself did not consistently participate, limiting the inclusivity and effectiveness of the process. As a result, while the Nairobi Process produced political declarations and partial agreements, it failed to secure a comprehensive ceasefire with all key actors (Ebuteli, 2023).

At the continental level, the Luanda Process, led by Angolan President João Lorenço, has focused on interstate tensions between Félix Tshisekedi and Paul Kagame. A major milestone was reached in November 2022, when a ceasefire agreement was announced in Luanda, calling for the cessation of hostilities, the withdrawal of M23 from occupied areas and the deployment of a regional force (Africa News, 2023).

This was followed by additional roadmaps and verification mechanisms in 2023, including commitments to disengagement. However, violations of the ceasefire were repeatedly reported on both sides, and the implementation of withdrawal commitments remained partial. Thus, while Luanda produced more concrete diplomatic outputs than Nairobi, its effectiveness has been constrained by weak enforcement.

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Following the Luanda process, the African Union sought to streamline mediation efforts through the appointment of Faure Gnassingbé, President of Togo, as facilitator in 2025 (Radio Okapi, 2025). This initiative aimed to harmonize regional mediation tracks, facilitate dialogue between the DRC and Rwanda but also to reinforce African-led solutions.

However, unlike the Luanda Process, the Lomé facilitation has not yet produced a formal standalone peace agreement. Instead, it has functioned as a complementary diplomatic channel, supporting ongoing negotiations and attempting to bridge gaps between existing frameworks. Its main limitation lies in its lack of clearly defined authority vis-à-vis Nairobi and Luanda, which has reduced its visibility and impact despite its strategic intent.

b. Global engagement and alternative mediation arena: Washington initiatives/ Doha process

Beyond Africa, the United States has assumed a significantly more assertive diplomatic role in the Great Lakes region, particularly following the return of Donald Trump to office in 2025. Under his administration, and through the leadership of Marco Rubio as well as the active involvement of Massad Boulos, the US shifted from a largely supportive role to that of a central diplomatic broker in the M23 crisis.

This engagement culminated in the signing of a U.S. brokered peace agreement in Washington in June 2025 between the DR Congo and Rwanda (Reuters, 2025). The agreement often referred to as the Washington Accord included commitments to cease hostilities, respect territorial integrity, disengage support for armed groups, and promote regional economic cooperation, particularly in strategic mineral sectors. It also reflected a broader U.S. policy shift toward linking peacebuilding with economic partnerships and investment incentives (Gavin, 2026).

However, despite its diplomatic significance, the Washington agreement remains structurally fragile. Key

provisions such as the withdrawal of Rwandan forces, the neutralization of armed groups including M23, and the effective implementation of ceasefire mechanisms have faced significant challenges (Jeune Afrique, 2024). Reports of continued hostilities shortly after the agreement highlight the persistent gap between diplomatic commitments and realities on the ground (Anderson, 2025).

Rather than consolidating mediation efforts into a unified framework, the Washington process has effectively added another layer to already fragmented peace architecture. Its coexistence with regional initiatives such as the Nairobi and Luanda processes, as well as parallel diplomatic engagements, contributes to a diffusion of authority and reinforces the multipolar character of mediation in the M23 crisis.

At the same time, the emergence of Qatar as a mediator further illustrates the diversification of diplomatic arenas. In 2025, Doha hosted a high level meeting between Félix Tshisekedi and Paul Kagame, facilitating direct dialogue and confidence building measures. The Doha process has emphasized discreet, leader level engagement and has contributed to temporary ceasefire arrangements, including discussions involving M23 representatives (African Security Analysis, 2025).

However, like the Washington initiative, the Doha process has not resulted in a fully institutionalized and enforceable peace agreement. Its informal and confidential nature offers flexibility but also limits transparency, accountability, and long-term impact (Al Jazeera, 2025). Together, these parallel efforts underscore a defining feature of the current phase: the expansion of mediation spaces without corresponding consolidation, reinforcing a fragmented and competitive peacemaking environment.

c. Comparative trajectories and outcomes of mediation processes

A closer examination of the various mediation initiatives reveals significant differences not only in their approaches, but also in their timelines, outputs, and levels of effectiveness. Taken together, these processes

illustrate a pattern of incremental diplomatic production without corresponding transformation on the ground.

Looking ahead, the evolution of the international context is likely to further reshape the geography of mediation. The increasing instability in the Middle East affecting traditional diplomatic hubs such as Doha has prompted a relocation of negotiation platforms toward more neutral and stable environments. Such a shift does not only reflect changing geopolitical realities but also reinforces the trend toward the internationalization of mediation spaces in the M23 crisis (Pole Institute, 2025).

The geographical relocation of mediation spaces from Nairobi and Luanda to Doha and then to Montreux, Switzerland symbolizes not progress, but the displacement of unresolved tensions across diplomatic arenas.

d. From outputs to impact: A fragmented peace architecture

Despite the production of multiple agreements, declarations, and diplomatic engagements, the overall impact on the ground remains limited. Ceasefires are frequently violated, armed groups continue to operate,

and trust between state actors remains fragile. This discrepancy between diplomatic output and practical impact reflects a deeper structural issue, the absence of coordination among mediation tracks (International Crisis Group, 2025).

Rather than reinforcing each other, these processes often operate on different timelines, engage different actors and produce non-binding or weakly enforced commitments. As a result, the multiplication of agreements does not necessarily translate into sustainable peace.

The inclusion of multiple actors from regional leaders to continental and global figures demonstrates a strong and sustained commitment to resolving the M23 crisis. However, this multiplicity has also produced unintended consequences. The coexistence of overlapping initiatives, each with its own logic and constituency, has transformed the peace process into a fragmented and competitive system, where coordination is weak, and outcomes remain uncertain. The challenge is not the lack of peacemaking efforts, but the need to reconcile them into a coherent and enforceable framework (Bram & Said, 2025).



U.S. President Donald Trump, Rwandan President Paul Kagame, and DRC President Félix Tshisekedi at the signing of a U.S.-brokered peace agreement in Washington, D.C., in June 2025. (Photo Credit: Présidence RDC)

Analysis: Legitimacy Under Strain

Legitimacy constitutes a foundational pillar of effective peacebuilding. It shapes not only the acceptance of agreements, but also their implementation, durability, and capacity to transform conflict dynamics (Jonas & Michael, 2019). In deeply fragmented conflict environments such as eastern DR Congo, legitimacy is not a given attribute of mediation it is continuously negotiated, contested, and redefined.

The proliferation of mediation initiatives in the M23 crisis has fundamentally altered the landscape of legitimacy. While the multiplication of peacemaking efforts is often justified as a means of increasing inclusivity and diplomatic pressure, it paradoxically generates ambiguity over authority. When multiple actors simultaneously claim the role of mediator whether through the Nairobi Process, the Luanda Process, African Union facilitation, or external engagements in Doha and Washington the result is not a cumulative strengthening of legitimacy, but its fragmentation.

From a theoretical perspective, this dynamic can be understood through the distinction between input legitimacy (who participates in the process) and output legitimacy (what results the process produces) (Scharpf, 1999). In the current mediation landscape, both dimensions are under strain. Input legitimacy is weakened by the exclusion of key local stakeholders, while output legitimacy is undermined by the limited implementation of agreements and repeated ceasefire violations (International Alert, 2021-2025).

Competing mediation frameworks generate uncertainty regarding which process holds primary authority. For instance, commitments made under the Luanda Process may not align with discussions held in Nairobi, while informal engagements in Doha may bypass both. This institutional overlap creates a situation in which no single framework is recognized as definitive, thereby diluting the credibility of each.

In addition, the geographic and political distance of these processes from conflict affected communities further erodes legitimacy. Negotiations conducted in capitals such as Nairobi, Luanda and Doha are often disconnected from local realities in North and South Kivu (Pole Institute, 2022). Civil society organizations, customary authorities, women's groups, and youth actors who bear the direct consequences of violence are frequently marginalized or entirely excluded.

This exclusion produces several interrelated effects. First, agreements risk lacking local ownership, reducing their social acceptance and long-term sustainability. Second, unresolved community grievances particularly those related to land, identity, and security remain outside the scope of negotiations, thereby perpetuating underlying drivers of conflict. Third, peace processes are increasingly perceived as externally imposed political arrangements, negotiated among elites and international actors, rather than as inclusive pathways toward collective security (Autesserre, 2010).

From a systems perspective, mediators themselves become embedded within the conflict ecosystem. Rather than operating as neutral facilitators, they emerge as competing nodes of authority, each associated with distinct political, regional, or geopolitical interests. The involvement of actors such as Donald Trump, Uhuru Kenyatta, João Lorenço and Faure Gnassingbé illustrates the density of this mediation field.

When these interventions are not effectively coordinated, they introduce additional layers of competition and complexity. Conflict actors can exploit this fragmentation by selectively engaging with processes that offer greater strategic advantage; a dynamic that further undermines the authority and coherence of mediation efforts.

Legitimacy in the M23 peace process is not only under strain it is structurally fragmented. The multiplication of mediation initiatives, in the absence of a unifying framework and inclusive participation, risks transforming peacebuilding into a contested arena where authority is diffuse, accountability is weak, and trust remains fragile.

The marginalization of Rule of law

A recurring and structurally significant feature across mediation tracks in the M23 crisis is the consistent prioritization of short-term stability over long-term justice. Across the Nairobi, Luanda, and associated diplomatic processes, negotiations have predominantly centered on immediate security imperatives ceasefires, disengagement of forces, troop withdrawals, and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) frameworks while questions of accountability for serious human rights violations remain marginal or deferred.

This reflects a broader "stability first" paradigm that has become increasingly dominant in contemporary international peacebuilding. Within this approach,

the immediate cessation of hostilities is treated as the primary objective, while justice-related concerns are often framed as secondary or post-conflict issues to be addressed at a later stage. In the context of eastern DR Congo, however, this sequencing has proven deeply problematic (Call, 2008).

The region has experienced repeated cycles of large-scale violence over several decades, including widespread allegations of extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, forced displacement, recruitment of child soldiers, and systematic exploitation of natural resources (Amnesty International, 2025). These violations have been committed by both state and non-state actors, including armed groups operating in North and South Kivu, as well as elements within national and regional security forces. Despite the scale and persistence of these abuses, accountability mechanisms have remained weak, fragmented, or politically constrained (Internationale Center for Transitional Justice, 2021)(International Center for Transitional Justice, 2021).

In fact, frameworks such as the 2022 Nairobi Process, the Luanda mediation roadmap, and the broader regional commitments under the African Peace and Security Architecture recognize the importance of transitional justice (East African Community, 2022). But in practice, these processes have largely privileged political and military stabilization over judicial accountability. Even when ceasefire agreements or disengagement plans are reached such as those negotiated under the Luanda Process in 2022 and 2023, they rarely include detailed, enforceable provisions for investigating or prosecuting violations committed during or prior to hostilities.

This institutional gap contributes to the persistence of a culture of impunity. Armed actors whether state forces or non-state groups, are rarely subjected to credible judicial consequences for documented abuses. Judicial and accountability mechanisms, including national courts, military tribunals, and international instruments such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), have been selectively applied or politically constrained, limiting their deterrent effect.

Importantly, the absence of accountability does not merely represent a legal or normative failure; it has direct consequences for conflict dynamics. Unresolved grievances linked to past atrocities are not static historical residues. They actively shape present-day behavior by reinforcing distrust between communities, legitimizing

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cycles of retaliation, and sustaining recruitment narratives used by armed groups. In this sense, impunity functions not as an absence of justice, but as an active driver of continued violence (Autesserre, 2010).

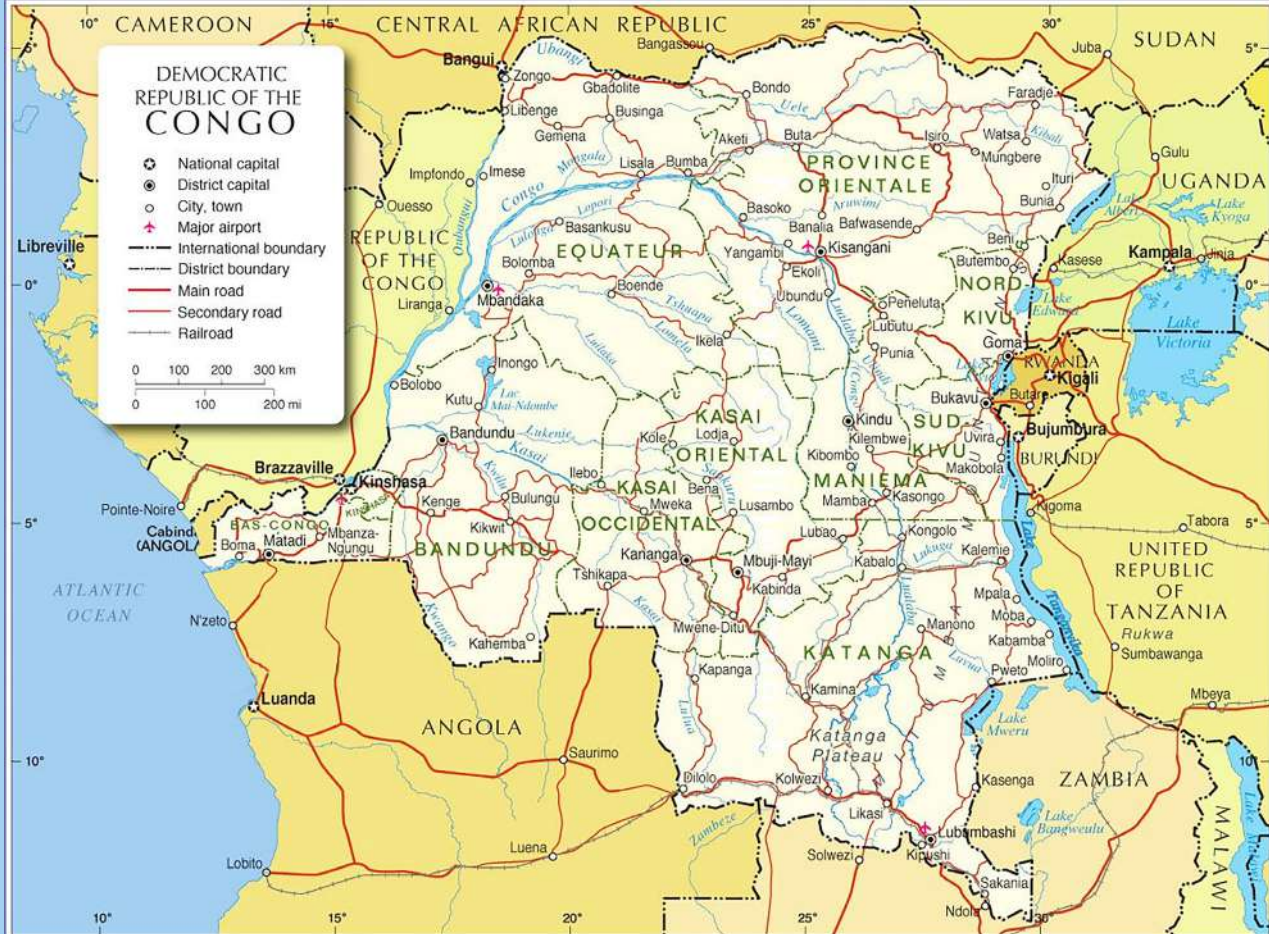
Empirical observations from the M23 resurgence since 2021 illustrate this dynamic clearly. Despite multiple diplomatic efforts and ceasefire attempts under the Nairobi and Luanda frameworks, repeated violations and renewed offensives have persisted. The limited integration of justice considerations into these agreements has contributed to their fragility, as affected communities perceive them as political arrangements that prioritize elite bargaining over victim recognition and redress (International Crisis Group, 2025).

From a structural perspective, the marginalization of the rule of law is closely linked to the fragmentation of mediation itself. The existence of multiple overlapping processes has created a situation in which accountability is diffused across different forums, with no single mechanism possessing the authority or mandate to systematically address violations.

As a result, peace agreements risk becoming instruments of conflict management rather than vehicles for structural transformation. Without the integration of credible accountability mechanisms, including transitional justice processes, reparations frameworks, and strengthened judicial cooperation, these agreements function primarily as temporary stabilization tools rather than durable resolutions.

Externalization of peacebuilding

The growing involvement of external actors in the M23 crisis has significantly complicated the mediation landscape,



Map of the Democratic Republic of Congo showing administrative boundaries, including the city of Goma in Kivu Province in the eastern region of the country near Rwanda border (Photo Credit: NationsOnlineProject)

contributing to what can be described as the progressive externalization of peacebuilding in the eastern DR Congo (Chandler, 2010). While international engagement can provide essential financial resources, technical expertise, and diplomatic leverage, it simultaneously raises critical questions regarding ownership, accountability, and the strategic priorities driving mediation efforts.

Historically, conflict intervention in eastern DRC has involved a wide range of external actors, including regional states, continental organizations, and global powers. Beyond security considerations, these interventions have often been influenced directly or indirectly by geopolitical and economic interests, particularly related to access to critical mineral resources such as coltan, cobalt, and gold (Ken & Eric, 2022). This has contributed to persistent perceptions among local populations that external actors may prioritize strategic or economic objectives that do not fully align with the needs and aspirations of affected communities.

In the current phase of the M23 conflict, this externalization is reflected in the multiplication of mediation venues and actors operating across different geopolitical spaces. While these multiple channels may enhance the availability of diplomatic entry points, they also contribute to a structural shift in which key decisions regarding peace and security are increasingly negotiated

outside national and regional institutional frameworks such as those of the DRC, the EAC, and the ICGLR. This trend risks weakening domestic governance structures and diluting the authority of regional institutions tasked with conflict management (International Crisis Group, 2025).

In addition, the coexistence of multiple external actors operating in parallel often with distinct mandates, strategic interests, and time horizons reinforces a fragmented mediation ecosystem. Rather than converging into a unified framework, initiatives in Nairobi, Luanda, Doha, Washington, and Lomé increasingly function as parallel diplomatic tracks, each producing partial outcomes but lacking effective coordination mechanisms.

This fragmentation has significant consequences. First, it undermines state ownership of the peace process, as national authorities must navigate multiple and sometimes competing diplomatic pressures. Second, it weakens institutional legitimacy at both national and regional levels, as external actors become de facto central players in conflict resolution. Third, it fosters dependency, where local and regional actors increasingly rely on external mediation rather than developing autonomous and sustainable conflict resolution capacities (Autesserre, 2010).

Over time, these dynamic risks eroding institutional resilience. Instead of strengthening African-led peace architectures, externalization may inadvertently contribute to the weakening of endogenous mechanisms of conflict management. In such a context, peacebuilding becomes less a process rooted in local governance structures and more a globally dispersed diplomatic exercise, shaped by the interests and priorities of multiple external stakeholders (UNDP, 2023).

Toward coherent mediation and legal accountability

Addressing the challenges of fragmented mediation requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. The following policy recommendations aim to enhance coherence, legitimacy, and effectiveness in peace efforts addressing the M23 crisis.

- **Establish a unified mediation framework**

Regional and continental organizations should work toward harmonizing existing mediation tracks under a single coordinated framework. The African Union is particularly well-positioned to play a central coordinating role.

This framework should align the objectives of the Nairobi and Luanda processes, clarify roles and responsibilities of mediators and ensure consistent communication and information sharing. A unified approach would reduce duplication, strengthen leverage over conflict actors, and enhance overall coherence.

- **Prioritize inclusive peace processes**

DRC leaders must take the initiative to move peacebuilding efforts beyond elite-driven negotiations to include a broader range of stakeholders. This includes civil society organizations, women and youth groups, traditional and community leaders, representatives from conflict affected areas. Inclusive processes enhance legitimacy, improve the quality of agreements, and ensure that local realities are reflected in policy decisions.

- **Integrate the Rule of law into mediation**

Mediators and parties have to ensure the rule of law is a central pillar of peace negotiations, not a secondary consideration. This requires embedding accountability mechanisms within peace agreements, supporting national and international judicial processes, strengthening institutions responsible for justice and human rights. Balancing peace and justice is complex,

but sustainable peace cannot be achieved without addressing impunity.

- **Strengthen regional institutional leadership**

Regional organizations must play a more decisive role in coordinating and sustaining peace efforts. This includes enhancing the capacity of regional bodies to manage complex mediation processes, promoting collaboration between organizations such as the East African Community (EAC), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the African Union (AU), and AU, developing long-term institutional mechanisms for conflict prevention. Stronger regional leadership can reduce reliance on external actors and promote ownership.

- **Align international engagement with local priorities**

International actors should ensure that their interventions support, rather than fragment, existing frameworks. This involves coordinating with regional initiatives, avoiding parallel or competing processes and prioritizing long-term governance and institutional development. External engagement should reinforce, not replace, local and regional peacebuilding efforts.

Conclusion

The M23 crisis highlights a critical paradox in contemporary peacebuilding: the multiplication of mediators does not necessarily lead to more effective peace. Instead, it can deepen fragmentation, not only among conflict actors but also within the very systems designed to resolve conflict.

As eastern DRC continues to experience complex and interlocking dynamics of violence, addressing fragmentation requires more than military or diplomatic interventions. It demands a coherent approach that integrates legitimacy, inclusivity, and the rule of law.

Without such a shift, the region risks remaining trapped in a cycle where multiple peace processes coexist, yet sustainable peace remains elusive. The challenge, therefore, is not simply to increase the number of peacemakers, but to ensure that their efforts are aligned, accountable, and grounded in the realities of those most affected by conflict.

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Rwanda's Geopolitical Projection and Counterterrorism Partnership in Mozambique: Implications for Mozambique's Security Architecture

By Fátima Chimarizeni Papelo, Ph.D

Abstract

The purpose of this article was to analyze how contemporary regional African geopolitics is being shaped by African state actors in the context of fighting new threats to security posed by non-state actors in Mozambique. Questioning to what extent is Rwanda presence in Mozambique shaping Mozambique's national security architecture, this work analyses which implications stem from Rwanda's efforts as a security provider in Mozambique. While the recent renewal of partnership has reinforced Rwanda presence in Mozambique projecting its military, economic and geopolitical power it raises concerns over deepening of Mozambican security vulnerabilities. Drawing on a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach, and using a literature review as the research method, the main argument in this article was built. This article concludes that creating a concise security architecture is needed for Mozambique in a context of active African geopolitical moves. Addressing issues at the strategic and operational levels is critical to sustain the gains yielded from Rwanda-Mozambique partnership in the long run.

Introduction

Over the last decade, Mozambican national security strategy has been redefined due to terrorism. Since the emergence of terrorism in northern Mozambique in July 2021, Mozambique national security has undergone significant change in strengthening its national security policy instruments. The approval of the Mozambique's National Policy on Defense of 2019 depicts a commitment to update its security instruments in a sensitive moment. For nearly five years, Rwanda has been supporting Mozambique in fighting terrorism in the north of Cabo Delgado. Rwanda's military intervention in Mozambique, which began in July 2021, represents a direct response to the escalating insurgency in Cabo Delgado. This intervention aims to support the Mozambican Armed Forces in restoring security and stabilizing areas affected by terrorism. Acting on the basis of bilateral agreements, Rwanda stands out for its readiness and effectiveness in recapturing strategic territories. Through its efforts in Mozambique, Rwanda is gaining relevance in shaping regional African geopolitics in place of traditional western actors.

The question that arises at this point is: to what extent does Rwanda's engagement in combating terrorism in

Mozambique constitute an instrument of geopolitical projection in Eastern and Southern Africa, and what are its implications for Mozambique's security architecture?

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach, using a literature review based on articles, books, dissertations, theses, and news reports.

Rwanda's Growing Geopolitical Projection in Eastern and Southern Africa

Military cooperation has increasingly become a central pillar for the projection of power and the strengthening of diplomatic ties between states, contributing to their geopolitical positioning or repositioning in areas of strategic interest. In contemporary international relations, security partnerships are no longer limited to defense purposes alone; they are also instruments through which states expand influence, consolidate alliances, and reinforce their strategic presence in regional and global politics. As a result, military cooperation agreements, counterterrorism partnerships, and joint security operations are increasingly sought after by major geopolitical actors.

Although classical geopolitical concepts are often criticized for their historical associations with imperialism and territorial domination, they still provide useful analytical tools when critically revisited and stripped of their normative assumptions. Strategic projection, territorial influence, and competition for regional dominance remain central elements in understanding contemporary geopolitics. Nowadays, geopolitical influence is exercised not only through military means, but also through economic, financial, technological, institutional, and discursive instruments. Nevertheless, physical presence in a territory continues to be one of the most visible and effective mechanisms of geopolitical influence.

A nation's geographic setting is not neutral; it creates both constraints and opportunities that influence how states behave in the international system. Owens (1999) argues that geography plays a fundamental role in shaping a country's foreign policy and strategic choices. For example, factors such as location, access to resources, borders, and proximity to conflict zones can limit certain policy options while enabling others. The author believes that Geopolitics builds on this idea by studying how

geography affects political power and strategic behavior among states. It is closely linked to strategic geography, which focuses on the control or access to important territorial spaces. These spaces are significant because they directly affect a country's security and economic prosperity. In essence, geopolitics explains how physical space becomes a source of power, competition, and influence in global affairs.

According to Owens (1999) assertion, we can assume that Rwanda's geographic position in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa plays a fundamental role in shaping its foreign policy and strategic choices. The country is landlocked, without direct access to seaports, and surrounded by larger neighbors such as Tanzania, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi. This geographic constraint has historically limited its economic access to global trade routes and increased its dependence on regional cooperation for imports and exports.

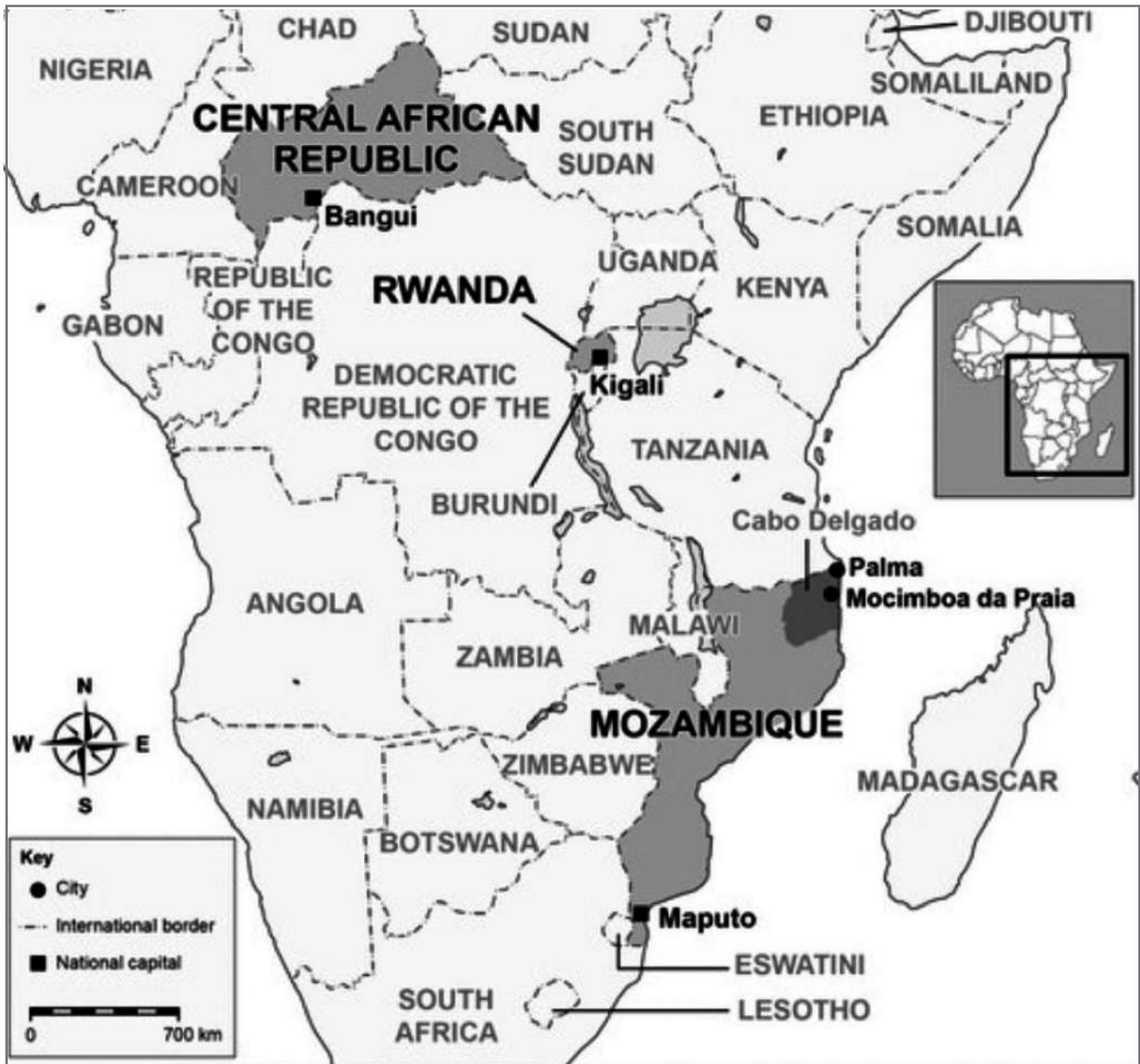
In response to these limitations, Rwanda has actively pursued strategies to expand its influence beyond its immediate territory. It seeks opportunities to "stretch" its



Rwandan troops arrive in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, as part of a 1,000-member deployment to support efforts against the Islamic State-linked insurgency threatening stability in the region (Photo Credit: Reuters)

strategic space through economic partnerships, military cooperation, political alliances, and peacekeeping engagements. A clear example is Rwanda's participation in peacekeeping missions under the United Nations, as well as its bilateral security engagements in countries

such as Mozambique (Map 1), where it deployed forces to support the fight against insurgency in Cabo Delgado. Map 1: Rwanda and its RDF deployments to CAR and Mozambique's Cabo Delgado.



Source: Cannon & Donelli (2022)

Geography has therefore influenced how the Rwandan state behaves within the African international system. It actively seeks access to resources, foreign investment, strategic partnerships, and secure environments for economic expansion. Its engagement in regional security also enhances its diplomatic visibility and political influence. Ultimately, Rwanda's security and economic prosperity are closely tied to its ability to transform geographic constraints into strategic

opportunities through regional integration and geopolitical engagement.

Rwanda Geopolitical Projection and Counterterrorism in Mozambique

Cooperation between Mozambique and Rwanda in the fight against terrorism in Cabo Delgado has opened an important strategic window for Rwanda's geopolitical ambitions in Eastern and Southern Africa. Following

President Filipe Nyusi's request for support in 2021, Rwanda became the first external actor to send troops to the province, even before the broader deployment of the SADC mission. This gave it a prominent role on the ground and within the regional security architecture (Hanlon, 2021; Al Jazeera, 2021).

According to reports, the initial contingent consisted of approximately 1,000 military personnel, including Rwandan defense forces and police, who were deployed in July 2021. These forces were quickly deployed to critical areas such as Mocímboa da Praia and Palma (Map 2), playing a central role in retaking areas occupied by insurgents. Subsequently, various news sources reported a gradual increase in the Rwandan presence, with estimates putting the total at around 6,300 troops, including support and internal security units (Al Jazeera, 2022; Massango, 2026).

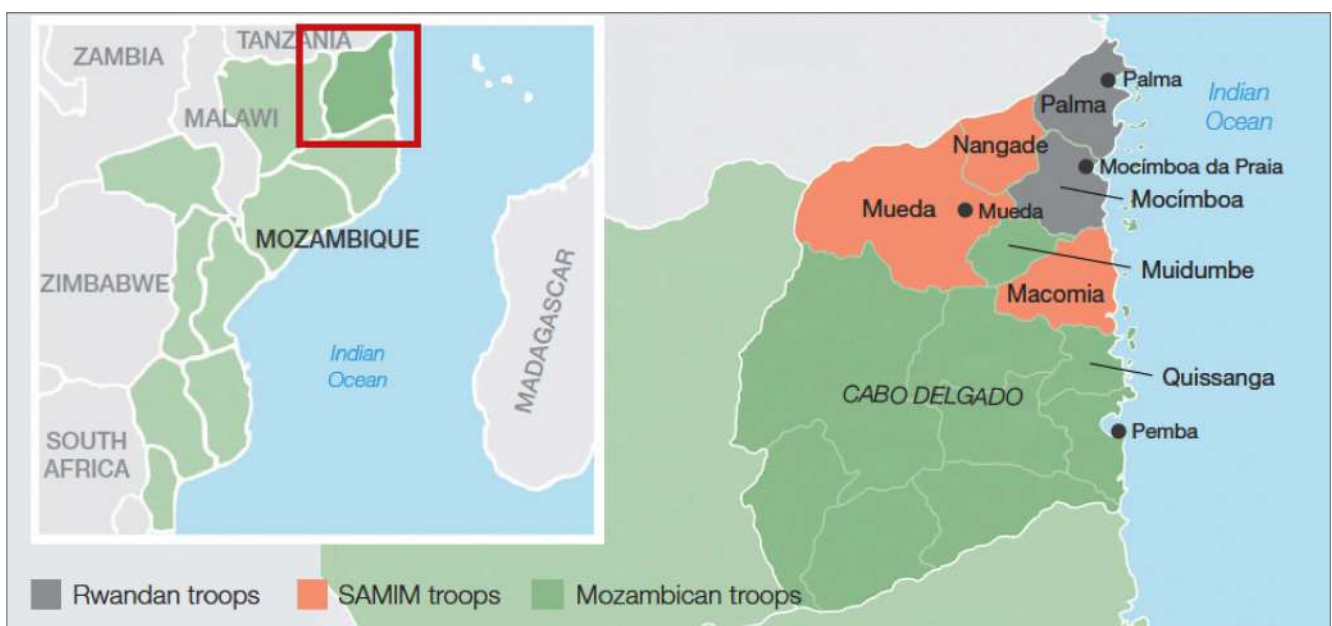
Through its military engagement in Mozambique, particularly in Cabo Delgado, Rwanda has established more than a simple security partnership. Its presence creates logistical networks and a permanent corridor of contact between the two countries, fostering both material and symbolic connectivity between Mozambique and Rwanda. This engagement also contributes to the creation of political and military interdependence, while facilitating the circulation of Rwandan strategic ideas, security doctrines, and diplomatic influence. Consequently, Rwanda strengthens its image, capacity

and status as an emerging African power in Central and Eastern Africa.

Nevertheless, the geopolitical and geostrategic position Rwanda has acquired in northern Mozambique cannot be interpreted solely through the lens of military cooperation, solidarity, or African brotherhood. It must also be understood within the broader context of African geopolitics, where regions and subregions frequently become spaces of competition for hegemony, influence, and strategic control.

Although Rwanda is not a global power, its projection in Africa has revealed that African states have been engaging in geopolitical practices competing with old hegemonic powers. This new trend in African geopolitics holds multiple layers of complexity as the old powers have not completely abandoned Africa, but due to global tensions and regional clashes such as the war in Europe and in the Middle East, they have been reducing their different sorts of geopolitical engagement including military and economic.

This significant military presence cannot be interpreted merely as technical cooperation. It is part of a strategy of power projection, enabling Rwanda to expand its political and strategic influence in a country with access to the Indian Ocean, significant natural resources, and strategic trade corridors. At the same time, the operational fragility of Mozambique's defense and



Map 2: Presence of Military forces in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique

Source: ISS (2022)

“Military cooperation has increasingly become a central pillar for the projection of power and the strengthening of diplomatic ties between states, contributing to their geopolitical positioning or repositioning in areas of strategic interest

security forces contributes to a growing dependence on Rwandan support, which reinforces Rwanda's continued presence and consolidates its influence within the local security architecture (International Crisis Group, 2021; Rabe, 2026).

It is important to highlight that Rwanda's engagement in Mozambique, which initially emerged as a solidarity-based and counterterrorism-oriented intervention, gradually evolved into a more institutionalized and strategically supported mission after 2022, particularly following the financial involvement of the European Union (EU). The growing international backing for the Rwandan deployment significantly altered the scale and political significance of its presence in Cabo Delgado.

In December 2022, the Council of the European Union adopted military assistance measures to support the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) deployed in Mozambique, including a grant of €20 million intended for the acquisition of military equipment and the maintenance of strategic air transport capabilities supporting operations in Cabo Delgado (Galeon, 2022). This financial support represented an important step in the international legitimization of Rwanda's military role in Mozambique and reinforced Kigali's image as a reliable African security partner.

The support was further expanded in 2024, when the European Union approved an additional €20 million under the European Peace Facility to sustain RDF operations in northern Mozambique. According to the Council of the European Union, the funding aimed to support equipment procurement and strategic airlifting capabilities for Rwandan troops operating against terrorist groups in Cabo Delgado (European Council, 2024). The continuation of European funding demonstrates that Rwanda's presence in Mozambique is no longer perceived merely as a temporary bilateral security arrangement,

but increasingly as part of a broader international security architecture in the region.

However, critics argue that the EU's continuous support for Rwanda also contributes to strengthening Kigali's geopolitical influence in Eastern and Southern Africa. Kennes and Titeca (2025) argue that the European Union's support has indirectly reinforced Rwanda's regional strategic positioning by enhancing its military projection capabilities and diplomatic leverage. Consequently, Rwanda's engagement in Mozambique should not be interpreted solely through the lens of solidarity or counterterrorism cooperation, but also as part of a wider geopolitical strategy involving international partnerships, regional influence, and strategic projection.

What Mozambique Gains from the Partnership?

The benefits brought by the partnership are grounded in shared responsibilities. There is indeed a direct correlation between military intervention and national security, which manifests itself in that intervention can simultaneously serve as both a means of strengthening and a risk factor for the security of the state being intervened in. On the one hand, successful interventions can contribute to the stabilization of conflict-affected regions by restoring state authority and protecting vulnerable populations (Byman, 2003, p. 18; Rabello, 2020, p. 41). The concept of national security has evolved significantly, shifting from a strictly military perspective to a multidimensional approach that encompasses political, economic, social, and environmental factors. According to Buzan (1991, p. 19), national security refers to the state's ability to preserve its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political autonomy in the face of internal and external threats.

Since the outbreak of terrorism in Mozambique Rwanda has played a critical role in supporting the restoration of security. The mandate for Rwanda's military intervention in Mozambique is key to understanding the nature and scope of this operation. Since the mission began in July 2021, the Rwandan government, in coordination with the Mozambican government, has established that the primary objective would be to combat insurgents in Cabo Delgado and restore order in areas affected by jihadist violence (Habibe, 2021).

The strategies adopted by Rwanda are highly dynamic and effective, particularly in 2021, and have resulted in the dispersal of terrorists to peripheral and less strategic

areas. After the Mozambican government requested external assistance, Rwanda in 2021 deployed around 1,000 soldiers and police, quickly retook Mocímboa da Praia and secured other areas. Nearly five years later, the terrorist group has continued its bloody insurgency, and Rwanda's deployment has reached more than 4,000 troops.

It is noted that the Rwandan intervention contributed significantly to the recapture of strategic territories and to the reduction of the insurgents' operational capacity. However, this intervention also raises questions about external military dependence, the influence of economic interests, and the long-term sustainability of security. Although Rwanda's military intervention is effective in the short term, it could undermine Mozambique's strategic autonomy and the sustainability of its national security in the long term. This issue is particularly relevant given that the Mozambican government faces structural challenges in consolidating its defense forces and managing complex threats such as terrorism.

Notwithstanding, Rwanda's commitment to supporting Mozambique in regaining territorial control over strategic areas, particularly those where natural gas projects are located has been challenged by recent claims of fund cutting. This likely disengagement directly affects Mozambique national security architecture. Actually, Mozambique's approach to military cooperation with Rwanda has not proven effective in altering substantially its national security architecture, as it does not focus on strengthening its own military capabilities, frameworks or structures.

The mission, therefore, was designed to ensure that the operations of major investors, such as TotalEnergies, could continue without the threat of insurgent attacks (Nimusiima, 2022, p. 91). This part of the mandate reflects the intersection between security and the economy, in which military operations also aim to create an environment conducive to sustainable economic development (Meyer, 2022, p. 44). Consequently, the

mission has significant impact at the operational and tactical level more than at the strategic level.

Implications for Mozambique National Security Architecture

Rwanda's military engagement in Mozambique reflects more than a counterterrorism partnership; it constitutes a broader strategy of geopolitical projection in Eastern and Southern Africa. Through a "security-first" foreign policy, Rwanda has positioned itself as an emerging African security provider by participating in stabilization missions and deploying the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) in strategic regions such as Cabo Delgado. This military diplomacy allows Rwanda to expand its regional influence, strengthen bilateral alliances, and gain strategic access to the Indian Ocean corridor through Mozambique. Simultaneously, Rwanda enhances its international reputation, attracts investment, and consolidates domestic legitimacy through a narrative of stability and security effectiveness.

On the other hand, Mozambique's security architecture reveals significant structural fragilities. The country's defense policy, the National Policy of Defense and Security of 2019, remains reactive, while its counterterrorism strategy heavily depends on external actors such as Rwanda, SADC, and the European Union. Weak operational capacity, inadequate logistics, limited intelligence systems, and poor coordination within the Mozambican Armed Forces have deepened dependence on foreign military support. Consequently, the Rwanda-Mozambique relationship reflects a geostrategic asymmetry rather than a purely humanitarian partnership. Rwanda converts military cooperation into political and geopolitical capital, whereas Mozambique relies on external assistance to compensate for domestic security deficiencies. Cabo Delgado therefore emerges as a strategic space of influence, projection, and regional power competition.

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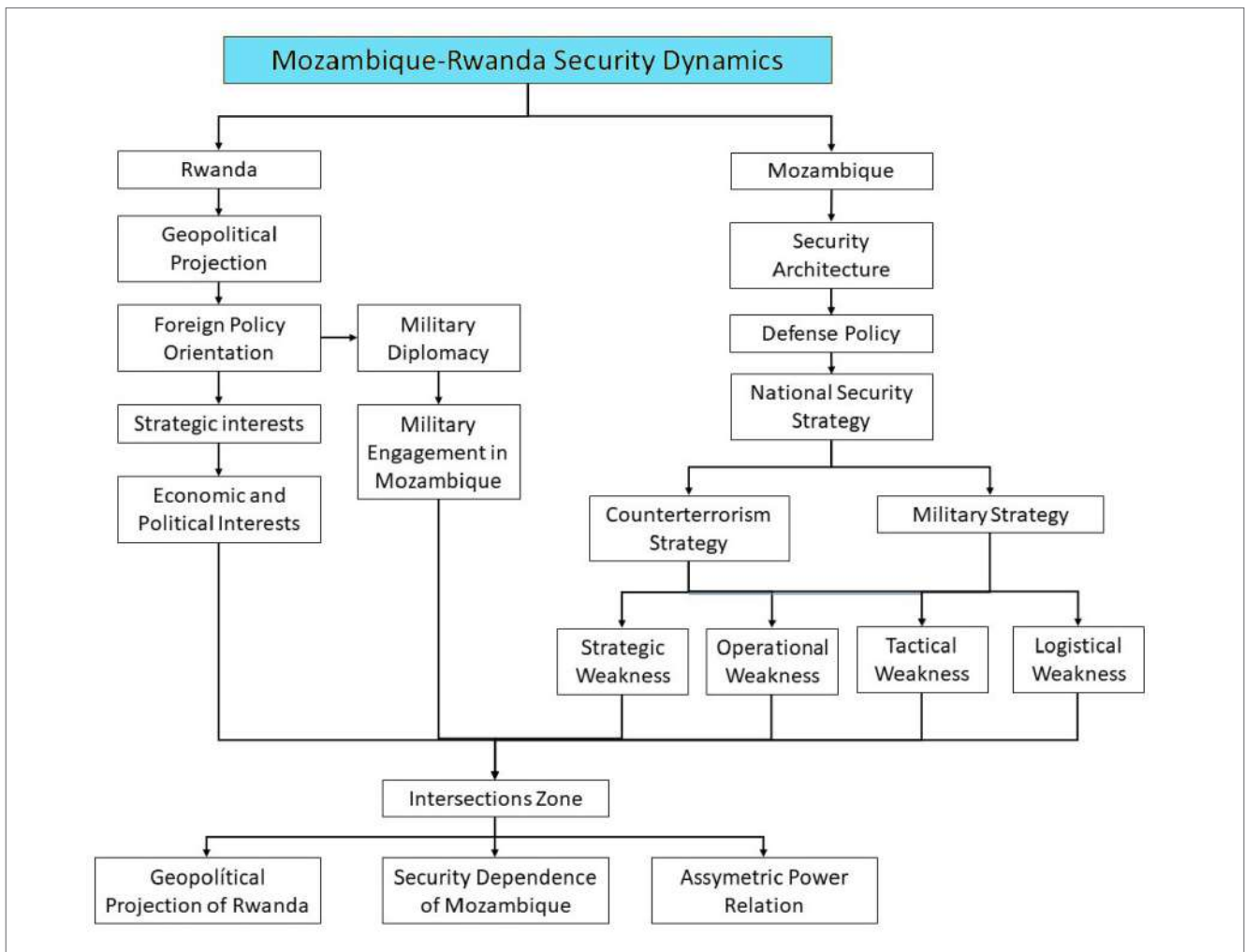


Figure 1: The Rwanda Geopolitical Projections and Mozambique's Security Architecture.

Source: Author

The Figure(1) above depicts how the relationship between Rwandan Geopolitical Projection has contributed not only to securing Cabo Delgado but to weaken Mozambique's security posture. Instead of improving capabilities, updating frameworks, reforming structures or accelerating its defense and security architecture, the Mozambican government has ceded the role of counterterrorism to Rwandan forces. Rwanda has a blank check to operate where government forces are unable or unwilling to operate. Although the Defense policy, the national security strategy and both the counterterrorism strategy and military strategy have focused on counter-insurgency and counterterrorism, little was made to materialize the ambitious desires into real and meaningful capacities at all levels (strategic, operational, tactical and logistical). The Rwandan forces on their side have been improving in all those levels.

Therefore, despite the benefits, dependence on Rwandan support undermines Mozambique's strategic autonomy,

posing risks of foreign economic influence in key sectors such as natural gas through bilateral agreements. The Rwandan presence, while proactive and technologically advanced, does not eliminate long-term vulnerabilities, as it prioritizes Rwandan bilateral interests over the strengthening of the Mozambican Armed Defense Forces (FADM).

To ensure sustainable national security architecture, Mozambique must maximize its partnership with Rwanda by investing in the internal capacity-building of the Mozambican Armed Forces (FADM) through joint training exercises, the acquisition of equipment such as drones, and the integration of civil-military strategies. It is recommended that Mozambican officers be sent to Rwandan military academies and that rehabilitation programs for former insurgents, modeled after the Rwandan approach, be implemented in conjunction with socioeconomic development in Cabo Delgado.

Conclusions and Recommendations

African regional geopolitics have been highly reshaped by African states' interests, goals, and actions. By taking roles of traditional actors whose presence has reduced in Central and Southern Africa these African states redefine the security architecture at the regional level. Rwandan geopolitical projection through its military, economic and political presence in Mozambique reveals that African states can secure their geopolitical interests providing security support to other states, yet this action per se is not enough to alter the national security architecture as seen in Mozambique.

Counterterrorism measures adopted in Cabo Delgado have shown that long-term vulnerabilities for Mozambique remain. Therefore, creating a coherent security architecture is needed. In that, it is important to address issues at the strategic and operational levels to build capacity, reform doctrine and renew strategy

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structures. Although Rwanda's potential withdrawal from Mozambique can undermine the achieved gains so far, yet Mozambique should yield more gains from this partnership to be manifested in the long run at the strategic and operational levels.

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Intricate Dynamics of Refugees, Migrations and Mobility of People in Africa: A Case of Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

By Edwine Otieno Ayoma

Abstract

This article seeks to bring out a comprehensive understanding of intricate dynamics of refugees, migrations and mobility of people in Africa. Utilizing qualitative methodology and incorporating the use of primary data collected through interviews and secondary data obtained from publicly available government databases and scholarly publications, the article is anchored on Jorgen Carling's capabilities and aspirations theory of migrations. To put the findings into perspective, this article is guided by the following objectives: to find out the various dynamics of refugees, migrations and human mobility in Africa, to identify the challenges faced by refugees in Kakuma refugee camp and to find out measures taken by Kenyan government to address the challenges experienced by refugees in Kakuma refugee camp. The findings reveal the perilous journeys that migrants and refugees have to undertake in pursuit of better lives and futures. The findings also reveal that there exist a number of challenges encountered by refugees in Kakuma camp. Finally, the study recommends inter alia, strengthening refugee reception and integration, addressing hostility and discrimination and improving refugee camp conditions.

Introduction and Background

History teaches us that no society or community is static and that migration is a natural human behavior dating back to the origin of humanity. From the ages of nomadic tribes to today's expatriates, we see a constant thread of human mobility weaving through the fabric of human existence. In his work, "Europe on the Move: War and Population Changes 1917-1947", Eugene Kulischer observes that migratory movement is endless, partial, and universal. He notes that migration has a ripple effect on everybody and reiterates that there is never a moment of immobility since no migration occurs in isolation (Ali et al., 2017). Migration can be forced or voluntary, depending on the push or pull factors. Modern-day migrations are instigated by pull factors broadly categorized into economic, social, political and environmental factors. The 2019 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reveals that the initiation of free movement and free trade by regional organizations such as the European Union and the East African Community has also contributed to a great extent cross-border migration. This is because migrants are assured of enjoying similar rights and freedoms as the citizens of host countries (OECD, 2019).

Additionally, studies by Zolberg et al. reveal that factors affecting push migration include religious persecution, conflicts/wars, drought and starvation (Zolberg et al., 1989). This is corroborated by the 2010 study conducted by the HORN Institute, which reveals that the major driving force of human migration and refugee movement is violent conflicts, eco-systemic disasters occasioned by climate change (drought, floods, and heat waves), oppression, and persecutions also compel people to migrate (HORN, 2010).

One of the critical challenges in migration research is lack of adequate data, which impedes scholars from carrying out holistic study. This data gap frequently leads to disproportionate focus on refugees and ignorance on other immigrants who equally leave their home countries for various reasons. The notion that refugees are fundamentally different from other immigrants has also exacerbated this matter. However, Kogan and Kalter have advocated for overcoming this lacuna, arguing that refugee migration is a form of migration with integration patterns similar to other types of immigration (Kogan & Kalter, 2020). This treatise adopts a similar view in



Newly arrived refugees gather among rows of temporary shelters at Kakuma Refugee Camp in northwestern Kenya (Photo Credit: Reuters)

analyzing the intricate dynamics of refugees, migrations and human mobility in Africa.

Brankamp emphasizes that the notion that immigrants burden the host country is unfounded. He explains that free trade and the movement of people have demonstrated to the world that migrants benefit most economies (Brankamp, 2022). Castles et al. concur with Brankamp and postulate that given humane treatment, unrestricted freedoms and rights, immigrants contribute immensely to the growth of economies. They support the developing and declining sectors of the economy by making the labor markets more flexible. Migration boosts the age of the working population, and host countries benefit a lot from the new skills brought in by the migrants to improve their economies. More importantly, that migrants contribute more to revenue collection than the benefits they obtain from the host countries (Castles et al., 2014).

Sub-Saharan Africa has been marred by unending armed conflicts over the past two decades, resulting in a massive movement of refugees. The Horn of Africa is also a victim of armed conflicts, with countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia experiencing the risk of armed conflicts, leading to the inflow and outflow of refugees to neighboring countries (HORN, 2010). Kenya has been on

the receiving end due to the refugee influx experienced over the past three decades. In response to the unending conflicts in the region, the UNHCR established the Kakuma refugee camp in 1992 (Ali et al., 2017).

To put the findings into perspective and bring out the knowledge lacuna, this article adopts a qualitative case study methodology and is anchored on Jorgen Carling's capabilities and aspirations theory of migrations, which explores the role of aspirations in the migration process. The theory posits that people's desire to migrate is the work of their general life aspirations and their perceived geographical opportunity construction (Carling & Collins, 2020). In addition, people's capabilities to migrate are dependent on both positive ("freedom to") and negative ("freedom from") liberties. Capabilities and aspirations theory assumes that migration desires the general life preferences of people. That migration reflects people's subjective perceptions of opportunities and life elsewhere. Therefore, the factors that affect life in general alongside distinct migration desires are tendencies of a person to act in a particular manner, information, learning, identification, culture, and what people see most of the time. Desires, however ideally specific, are actually dependent on abilities (Carling & Collins, 2020). Increasing capabilities can also increase aspirations. The capacity to which substituting preference results in

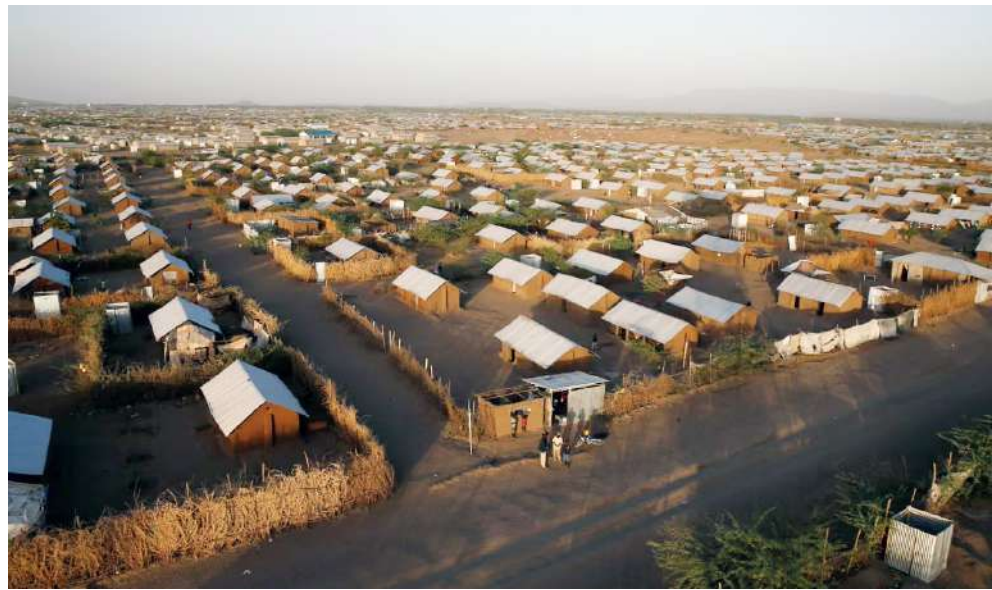
migration desires, however, depends on the extent to which individuals regard that their personal needs and wants can be locally met.

The capabilities and aspirations theory of migration provides a valuable framework for understanding motivations and constraints influencing migration. By bringing together aspirations and capabilities, the theory provided an understanding of why people choose to migrate (Carling, 2014). The theory highlights a person's subjective perceptions of opportunities and life in various places, which is critical in understanding how migrants view their present situation versus their aspirations.

An overview of Kakuma refugee camp

The History of Kakuma Refugee Camp dates back to 1992 when, among other refugee camps, it was established by the UNHCR to meet the growing number of refugees fleeing their home countries into Kenya. Located in the North Western region of Kenya, the camp is home to over 260,000 refugees as of 2024 according to the UNHCR database (UNHCR, 2024). While the camp was initially intended to host the "Lost Boys of Sudan," a group of young boys who fled the civil war in Sudan, the camp currently hosts a considerable proportion of refugees from Ethiopia, Djibouti, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Somalia, Burundi, and the DRC, hosting close to 21% of the total refugees in Kenya. The significant rise in population has been exacerbated by ongoing conflicts, economic hardships, pandemics and environmental factors in the refugees' home countries, leading to significant congestion and strain on resources within the camp (UNHCR, 2024).

Kakuma Refugee Camp



Kakuma Refugee Camp in Turkana County, northwestern Kenya, hosts approximately 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers (Photo Credit: Thomas Mukoya/Reuters)

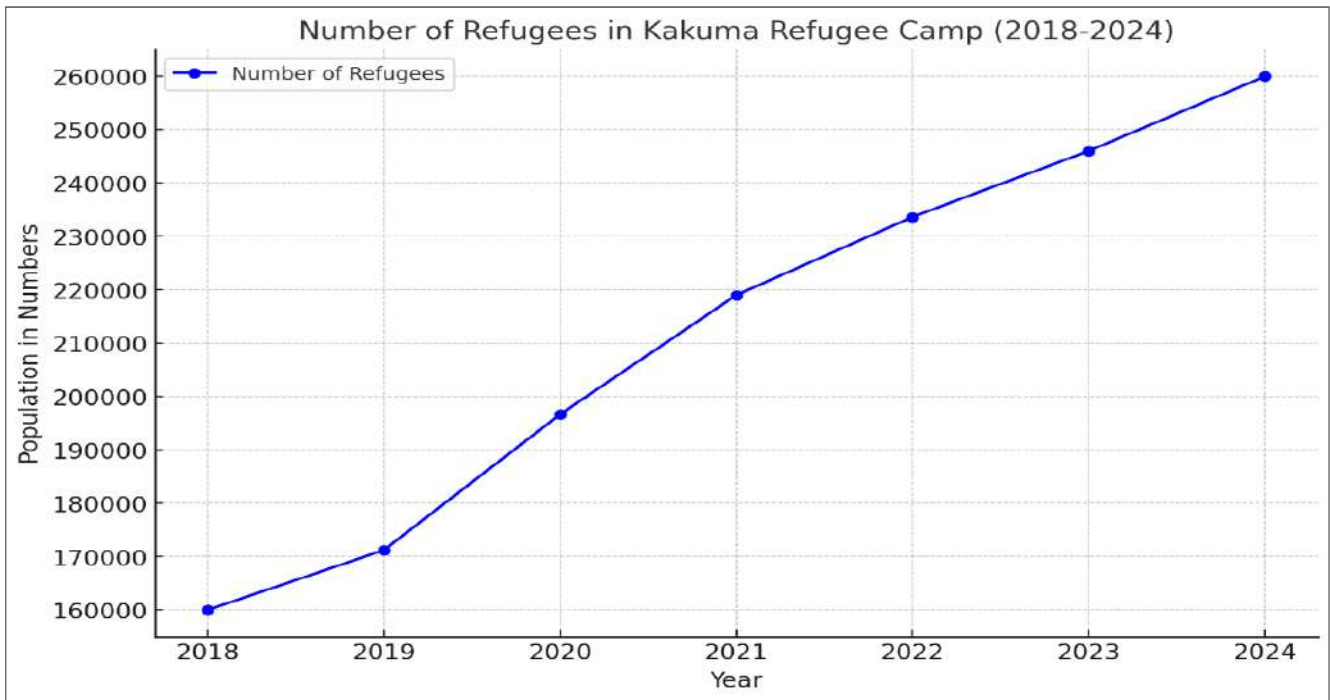
Kakuma refugee camp has progressively developed into a semi-permanent settlement where refugees and migrants can access essential services such as education, healthcare, and vocational training. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees jointly manages the camp in collaboration with the Kenyan government and various non-governmental organizations (UNHCR, 2020).

Refugees and their country of origin as of 2024

State	Number of Refugees	Percentage
Uganda	2,800	1.1%
Somalia	39,500	15.2%
Ethiopia	12,000	4.6%
Sudan	11,000	4.2%
DRC	20,000	7.7%
South Sudan	142,000	54.6%
Others	33,700	12.9%

Source: UNHCR (2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the global economy, and consequently, many people in the Horn of Africa faced hunger and a lack of basic needs, prompting them to seek refuge in camps like Kakuma. The pandemic exposed human life to danger, leading to many people relocating to safer places, thereby increasing the number of refugees in 2021 and 2022 (McAuliffe et al., 2022)



Source: UNHCR (2024).

a. The dynamics of refugees, migrations and human mobility in Africa

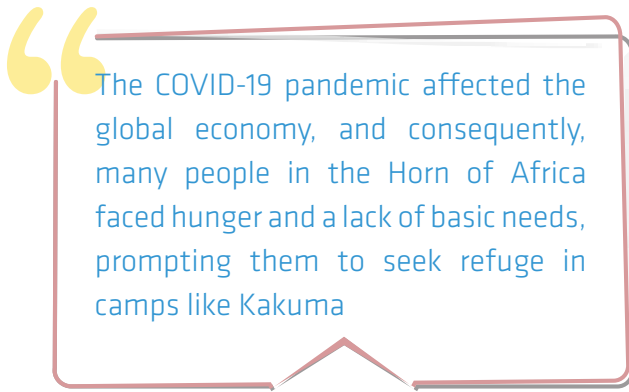
Many people are faced with the difficult decision of leaving their homes, either permanently or temporarily, in pursuit of a safer and better life across Africa. The decision to migrate brings with it sad experiences that eventually permanently affects the lives of the immigrants and refugees. For most immigrants and refugees, the migration journey across Africa is perilous characterized by accidents, injuries, musculoskeletal disorders and violence (IOM, 2020). Other immigrants and refugees also have tales of getting exposed to ill health due to several risk factors during their journey, leading to compulsory medical screening at the borders of the African countries they would like to settle. These mandatory medical screenings often create significant worries for immigrants, as failure to pass them may result in entry denial in the African country where the immigrants and refugees choose to settle. COVID-19 and Monkeypox tests are among the mandatory screenings that denied many migrants and refugees entry into many African countries and others around the world (WHO, 2021).

Other immigrants and refugees across Africa have to deal with harsh environmental conditions, physical threats, absence of most basic commodities and services, and long-term subjection to violence and trauma during their movements. Such experiences result in significant impact

on the mental health of immigrants (Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005). Additionally, upon reaching the host African countries, immigrants and refugees are forced to take up menial jobs in the agricultural sector, mining and construction sectors to provide for themselves and their dependents, exposing them to occupational hazards in their work areas (Moyce & Schenker, 2018).

Other immigrants and refugees are exposed to the risks of sexual harassment and exploitation while some undergo harrowing experiences like the audacious crossing of African water bodies in small boats and canoes. In their voyage, such refugees and immigrants, most of whom have no experience with water transport, die or lose loved ones when their boats and canoes capsize. Sometimes, they are stranded without food and other basic amenities due to rough waters and poor weather (UNHCR, 2020). Many migrants and refugees also end up in the hands of smugglers and militias during their migratory journeys across Africa, who sell them into slavery, preventing them from achieving their dreams of a better life (Van Liempt & Sersli, 2013).

Moreover, some refugees and immigrants endure walking long distances across African deserts without water, food or shelter. They get exposed to the vagaries of weather, with some ending up dead from dehydration and emaciation, while the few who make it suffer physical injuries and mental trauma (MSF, 2017).



b. Challenges faced by refugees in Kakuma refugee camp

Refugee preference for Kenya and Kakuma camp is due to its political stability, strategic geographical location, economic opportunities, and international organizations supporting them. Kenya is renowned for its political stability and democratic values governed by a robust constitution. Those interviewed at the Department of Refugees revealed that Kenya possesses an open-door policy whereby asylum seekers or refugees are allowed into the state through official borders, ensuring a safe haven for those seeking protection.

In as much as migrants and refugees aspire to move to host countries like Kenya for better lives, there is no guarantee that the intended host country will meet their expectations. Among the challenges refugees face at Kakuma as revealed by this article is the tightening of migration controls and vilification by border security officers, often under the pretext of belonging. These tight measures restrain refugees at the border from accessing the camps hence subjecting them to depression and frustrations. The refugees interviewed explained that fleeing from troubles and coming to another set of undefined issues subjected them to traumatic experiences at Kakuma.

The interviewees at Kakuma talked about growing anger and fear, coupled with hatred and lack of empathy from Kenyan citizens in the North leading to their poor reception. Moreover, some refugees complained of the camp management painting them as being out of control hence the hostility and unnecessary scrutiny, which leave them in the state of uncertainty.

Other interviewed refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan talked of sporadic raids conducted in their tents by camp authorities under the disguise of clearing the camp of the suspected Al-Shabaab militia. As a result, some

of them are ejected from the midst of other refugees, making their lives more miserable.

Interviewees also pointed out segregation campaigns targeting them with strict regulations such as those requiring them to demonstrate their necessity to live in Kakuma refugee camp. They gave their account of COVID-19 pandemic experience where they were forced to show their Covid-19 certificates or undergo a mandatory COVID-19 screening, an exercise that was too expensive for them to afford, leaving them stranded and at the mercies of the camp management.

The notion that refugees are a threat to social cohesion and economic stability aggravates discrimination and xenophobic attitudes (European Commission, 2020). Governments must have an obligation to put favourable regulations that protect the rights and freedoms of migrants and refugees. They should also be obliged to grant warm reception to migrants and treat them with humanity and dignity (UNHCR, 2020). Governments should also create inclusive policies that promote integration and social cohesion to help mitigate the negative impacts of anti-immigration sentiments. In addition, public awareness campaigns emphasizing the positive contributions of migrants to society and the economy can encourage empathy and reduce prejudice.

c. Measures taken by Kenyan Government to address challenges faced by refugees in Kakuma refugee camp.

There has been tremendous effort by the Kenyan Government to ensure refugees are treated humanely and with dignity. The Kenya Refugee Act, which came into force in 2022, reiterates the unwavering commitment by the government of Kenya to protect and empower refugees. This act has brought progressive changes in policies on refugee economic inclusion, refugee status determination, and integration into Kenya's national and local economy. The Act provides that refugees "shall have the right to engage individually or in a group, in gainful employment or enterprise or to practice a profession or trade where he/she holds qualifications recognized by competent authorities of Kenya." (Government of Kenya, 2022).

In addition, the novel Act describes refugee residences as "designated areas" rather than camps. The "designated areas" under the new Act are "any reception area, transit point or settlement areas as may be declared by the



Refugees protest at the UNHCR office in Kakuma camp after food rations were cut by a quarter (Photo Credit: Kakuma News Reflector)

Cabinet Secretary.” The Act equally grants total freedom to refugees from the East Africa Community the option to benefit from the rights accorded by the EAC Treaty and Protocol. Meaning, refugees from EAC member countries (Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan) are treated as EAC citizens, allowing them to move freely, live, and work in Kenya with a work permit. Finally, the new Act also provides that new Refugee Identity Card will have same standing as the Foreign Registration Certificate popularly known as “Alien Card” (Government of Kenya, 2022).

There also exists Encampment Policy which refugees should take advantage of. The Encampment Policy of Kenya grants refugees essential services such as food, shelter, education, healthcare, water and sanitation, reducing the need to move outside Kakuma refugee camp. The services are provided and funded by the National and county governments, local and international NGOs.

Freedom of movement is guaranteed and mobility within and outside the camp is encouraged as it highlights Kenya’s efforts to balance the restrictions of the encampment policy with the needs and rights of refugees to move for legitimate reasons. The camp management and the Kenyan government grant refugees freedom of movement, facilitated by several factors, including economic activities such as trade to enable development and improve refugee living standards. Education is another factor that facilitates the mobility of refugees outside the camp as individuals who thrive in academics are allowed to join higher learning institutions and travel to different places within the country to learn.

Conclusion

Migration dynamics have changed in the 21st century and this change will extend into the future. This article meticulously reveals the intricate dynamics of refugees, migrations and human mobility across Africa using

Refugee preference for Kenya and Kakuma camp is due to its political stability, strategic geographical location, economic opportunities, and international organizations supporting them. Kenya is renowned for its political stability and democratic values ...

In Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp, refugees battle discrimination, restrictive migratory controls, lack of empathy from the communities around the camp, prejudice, poor reception, and psychological challenges



Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya as a case study. The findings unearthed the grim reality of the perilous journeys marred by violence, harsh environmental conditions, life-threatening conditions and exploitation that migrants and refugees are forced to undertake in

pursuit of better lives and futures. Refugees and migrants not only face challenges in the course of their journeys but also upon arriving into their host countries. In Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp, refugees battle discrimination, restrictive migratory controls, lack of empathy from the communities around the camp, prejudice, poor reception, and psychological challenges. Despite the difficulties experienced by the refugees and migrants into Kenya, the government together with other partners have made significant efforts to address the needs of refugees. The enactment into law of Kenya Refugee Act, 2022, which anchors the rights and freedoms of refugees like integration into national economy, free mobility and economic inclusion, shows the commitment put by the Kenyan government to meet the needs of refugees and migrants. However, more still need to be done by the government to ensure good living conditions and overall well-being of refugees in Kakuma.

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About the Authors

Matundura Nyambunde

Matundura Nyambunde is an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya and a legal scholar with expertise in regional integration, economic governance, migration, and refugee law. He holds a Master of Laws (LL.M.) degree from the University of Dar es Salaam, where he further developed his interest in the legal and policy frameworks shaping regional cooperation and cross-border mobility in Africa. His research and professional work focus on issues related to regional and economic integration, migration governance, refugee protection, and the rule of law.

Through his scholarship, he contributes to ongoing discussions on strengthening legal and institutional mechanisms that support sustainable development, regional cooperation, and human rights protection across the continent. In addition to his legal practice, Matundura serves as a Tutorial Fellow at Maasai Mara University, where he is involved in teaching, mentoring students, and advancing academic research. He also serves as an Associate Fellow in the Democracy, Governance, and Rule of Law Programme at the Horn Institute..

Matundura can be reached at matunduram@gmail.com

Babikire Lobela Carine

Babikire Lobela Carine is a dedicated peacebuilder, youth leader, and development practitioner from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with a Master's degree in International Cooperation for Peoples' Development. Her professional work focuses on the interconnected fields of diplomacy, civic engagement, environmental justice, and regional peacebuilding, reflecting her commitment to advancing sustainable and inclusive development across Africa.

She is passionate about promoting African-led approaches to governance, conflict prevention, and security, recognizing the importance of locally driven solutions in addressing the continent's complex social, political, and environmental challenges. As the National Coordinator of Equigreen for Peace, Carine leads initiatives aimed at fostering gender equality, environmental stewardship, and community-based peacebuilding. In addition, she serves as the East African Community (EAC) Deputy Youth Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Carine can be reached at carinelobela@gmail.com

Fátima Chimarizeni Papelo, Ph.D

Fátima Chimarizeni Papelo is an international relations scholar and educator dedicated to shaping the next generation of diplomats. She serves as a Professor and Researcher at the prestigious Higher School of International Relations, where she also holds the position of Deputy Director for Postgraduate Studies. With over a decade of experience in higher education, Fátima has specialized in teaching, curriculum design and evaluation, postgraduate program coordination, academic event management, and research.

Her scholarly work focuses on peace and conflict studies, Mozambican foreign policy, bilateral international cooperation, and economic development, with publications appearing in books and peer-reviewed international journals. Fátima has participated in and led research projects on bilateral cooperation, international peacebuilding from a gender perspective, and Global South dynamics, with work conducted across Mozambique, Kenya, Brazil, and Macau. She is an alumna of the European Union Visitors Programme (EUVP), the Kampala Geopolitics Academy, and the Be Like a Woman leadership program.

Fátima can be reached at fatimacardoso31@gmail.com

Edwine Otieno Ayoma

Edwine Otieno Ayoma is a scholar and practitioner in international studies, currently pursuing a PhD in International Studies at the University of Nairobi, where he also lectures in the Department of Diplomacy and International Studies. In addition, he serves as a lecturer at the Kenya Foreign Service Academy under the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, where he trains officers selected for service in Kenya's diplomatic missions abroad.

His research focuses on environmental diplomacy, digital diplomacy, migration, international law, international trade, and global cooperation. Through his academic and professional engagements, Edwine has authored, co-authored, and contributed to numerous studies addressing contemporary global and regional challenges. He actively participates in academic, policy, and diplomatic dialogues across Africa, bridging scholarship and practice to advance understanding of international affairs.

Edwine can be reached at edwineotienoa@gmail.com



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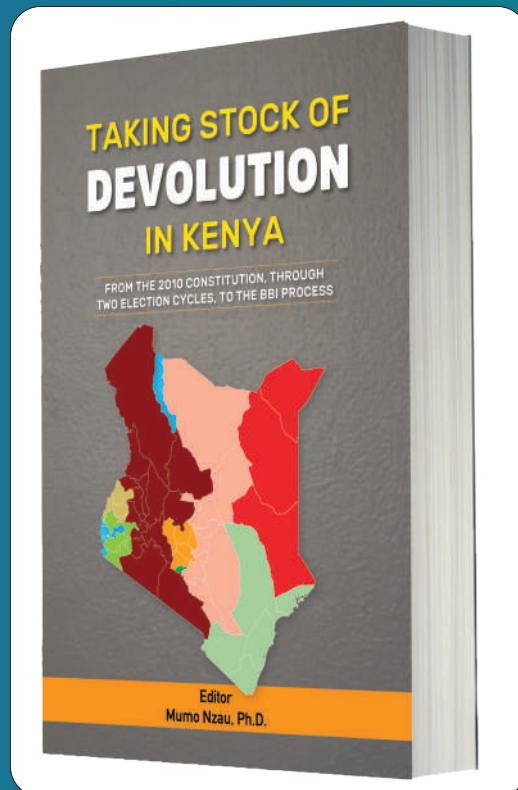
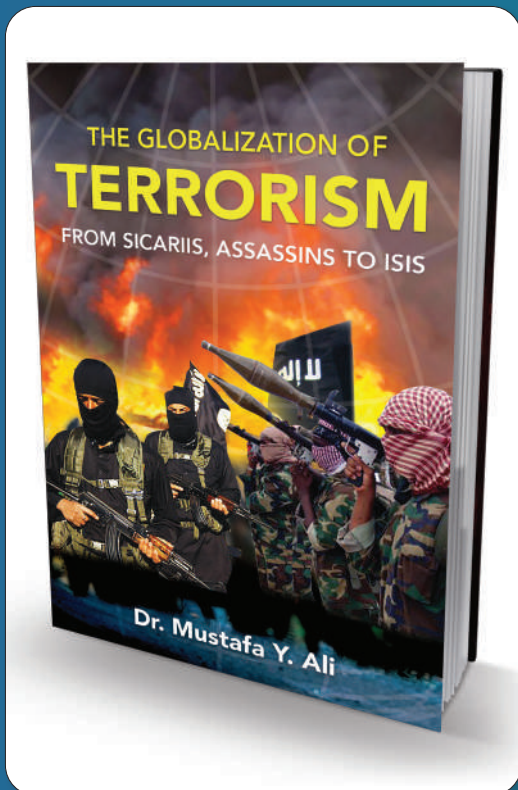
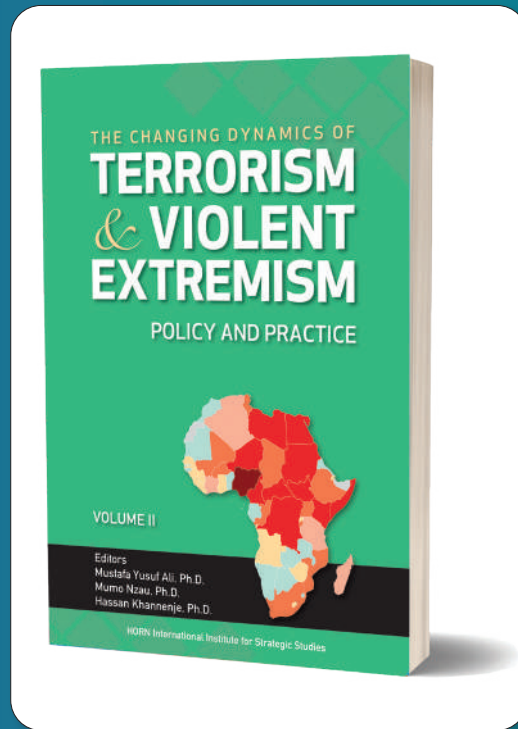
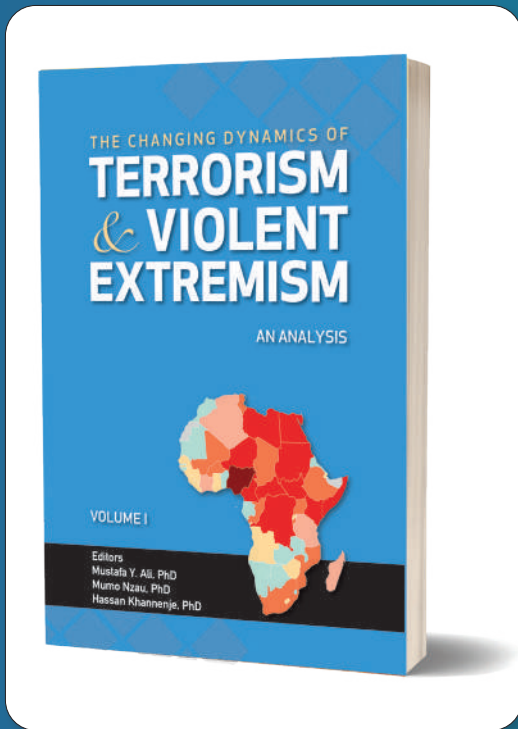
This webinar will examine Somalia's ongoing constitutional challenges and the debate surrounding presidential legitimacy in the country's evolving political landscape. Experts will explore the roots of the crisis, its implications for governance and stability, and potential pathways toward political consensus and democratic progress.

The unfinished transition and risk of relapse in South Sudan

Date to be decided

This webinar will explore the challenges facing South Sudan's fragile political transition and the factors that continue to threaten lasting peace. Experts will discuss the implementation of the peace agreement, key governance and security concerns, and the risks of renewed conflict, while examining opportunities to sustain the transition and prevent relapse into violence.

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