



ASWAN FORUM

THE ASWAN CONCLUSIONS ON SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA - SECOND EDITION

1-5 March 2021

Egypt hosted the second edition of the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development virtually from 1 to 5 March 2021. Titled, “**Shaping Africa’s New Normal: Recovering Better, Rebuilding Stronger**”, the Forum provided a platform for African heads of state, and leaders from government, international and regional organizations, the private sector, think tanks and civil society to discuss how Africa can rechart its pathway towards achieving sustainable peace and development post-COVID-19 through innovative solutions and robust partnerships.

The Forum highlighted that although the pandemic brings multilayered challenges to the continent, it also presents opportunities for Africa to reshape and enhance its humanitarian, peace, security and development responses. Echoing key messages from the first edition of the Aswan Forum, the second edition reaffirms the imperative of accelerating a paradigm shift from crisis management towards nationally owned prevention and resilience policies and interventions that address systemic risks and structural weaknesses.

The conclusions below encapsulate the outcomes of extensive deliberations held prior to and during the second edition of the Aswan Forum. They provide a holistic guiding framework to address the interconnectedness and overlap between Africa’s pre-existing vulnerabilities and today’s heightened risks resulting from the pandemic. Therefore, these conclusions can only work in tandem in a multisectoral, integrated approach that brings about the collective efforts of different stakeholders in order to achieve sustainable peace and development in Africa in the context of meeting the goals of the African Union’s (AU) Agenda 2063 and the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Towards a Stronger Recovery from COVID-19 in Africa

To rebuild better, Africa needs to accelerate the pace towards a strong recovery. Building upon Africa’s decisive and proactive responses, the immediate health impacts of the crisis must be mitigated to lay the foundation for long-term investment in sustainable peace and development.

African governments, the AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs) as well as their international partners are invited to:

- strengthen African pharmaceutical capacities and prioritize the local manufacturing of vaccines, diagnostics and drugs to boost health security
- advance the fair access and distribution of vaccines across the continent and reinforce cooperation towards ensuring global equitable access to vaccines, including through exerting robust efforts to benefit from existing and new Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waivers and flexibilities
- support the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) as the continental body connecting national health agencies and supporting public health institutions
- accelerate the establishment of the African Medicines Agency (AMA).

Rebuilding Better Beyond COVID-19

Addressing the Governance Challenge: Strengthening National Ownership and Fostering Resilient Institutions

The COVID-19 pandemic is a multifaceted threat, but first and foremost, it is a governance challenge. The pandemic has laid bare and exacerbated governance gaps across the different African health, economic and social sectors with implications for the peace and security landscape—most notably, exploitation by armed groups and terrorist organizations. Thus, shifting from crisis management to prevention requires robust attention to addressing root causes and structural vulnerabilities at the individual, community and national levels.

To lay the foundations for rebuilding better African societies and economies, crisis preparedness must be integrated into national policies and systems, most notably in healthcare and development planning. In line with the notion of national ownership, African governments must invest in building resilient and viable institutions at the national and local levels while ensuring the promotion of inclusive governance through a whole-of-government approach.

African governments with the support of the AU, as well as RECs/RMs and their international partners are encouraged to:

- ensure that responses to the pandemic address the interconnectedness between relief and recovery efforts as well as other pre-existing systemic risks and structural vulnerabilities
- reform and strengthen national institutions to address systemic risks, governance gaps and institutional voids so as to scale-up service provision through healthcare, social protection and equal access to economic opportunities and digital services

- devise a context-specific mandate with local authorities—across all sectors—and provide them with the necessary financial and technical resources to effectively deliver on sustainable peace and development priorities
- advance the implementation of the AU Operational Guidance Notes on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and the AU Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP), where appropriate, to promote African ownership, national institution-building, reconciliation and social cohesion, with a view of advancing justice, and safeguarding rule of law while not undermining the achievement of sustaining peace objectives.

***From Structural Prevention to Sustaining Peace:
Aligning Responses Across the Peace Continuum***

In fragility-affected, active conflict and post-conflict environments, the pandemic has reinforced the need for adopting a paradigm shift through the structural prevention and sustaining peace lens across political, peace, security and development efforts—as called for in the first edition of the Aswan Forum. Applying such a holistic approach across the peace continuum necessitates the anchoring of all efforts in comprehensive and integrated strategies which prioritize national and local resilience and ownership.

Accordingly, concerned African governments, the AU and RECs/RMs and their international partners should:

- operationalize the African Union Center for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (AUC PCRD) in Cairo, in order to (a) implement peacebuilding and PCRD programs along the peace continuum, (b) provide technical support and evidence-based research to AU Liaison offices and special representatives of the AU Chairperson, (c) support the mobilization of and cooperate with African-led development institutions, particularly the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and regional organizations, (d) strengthen policy coherence and coordination among various African and external stakeholders—to address the root drivers of fragility, armed conflict and violence in support of national peacebuilding priorities
- prioritize the allocation of sustained financial resources and technical expertise—via the capacity-building of national and local actors—for the implementation of peace agreement provisions across different sectors (particularly governance, security arrangements, human capital development, reintegration of returnees and economic stabilization through private sector development)

- anchor the implementation of the Protection of Civilians' (PoC) mandates in the long-term vision of building and sustaining peace within the contours of national political processes—in line with the Cairo Roadmap on Enhancing the Performance of Peacekeeping Operations: From Mandate to Exit, and in full coordination with the host country according to its national priorities and requirements for strengthening national and local capacities to implement protection activities
- support the pro-active engagement of the African Peacebuilding Caucus at the UN to advance the UN Peacebuilding Commission advisory, bridging and convening roles to the UN Security Council, UN General Assembly, and the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), with a view to (a) reviving the UN system engagement in addressing the root causes of conflict in Africa, (b) mobilizing sustained, flexible and catalytic financing for peacebuilding, and (c) advancing reinvigorated and integrated partnerships across all governance levels, particularly synergies and interlinkages between the UN and the AU
- capitalize on the annual consultative meeting between the AU Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) and UN PBC to deepen the partnership, enhance complementarities and leverage comparative advantages

***The Centrality of Inclusion for Sustainable Peace and Development:
Towards a Whole-of-Society Approach***

The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder that people and local communities are at the crossroads of every crisis. As such, including people in all efforts exerted by humanitarian, development and peace actors is imperative and has been widely recognized across international and continental normative frameworks.

Specifically, African governments are encouraged to:

- fully mobilize civil society in supporting recovery responses and rebuilding plans in order to support efforts towards addressing the immediate and long-term needs emerging from the pandemic
- design and implement tailored programs that include local communities in borderlands where major governance gaps exist while integrating development, prevention and peacebuilding approaches to resolve structural drivers of violence and armed conflict
- ensure that women's differentiated socio-economic needs and their key role in peacebuilding efforts are integrated in planning and programming and are allocated the necessary financial resources and capacities for a comprehensive implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda
- prioritize funding for the implementation of WPS National Action Plans (NAPs)

- devise targeted policies and programs to address the particular needs of African countries and communities most affected by climate change through accelerating climate adaptation and mitigating development and climate-related security risks
- integrate forcibly displaced populations in broader COVID-19 responses including economic stimulus packages and vaccination delivery towards long-term recovery and resilience-building
- adopt new modalities of youth inclusion in the labor market—most specifically by supporting entrepreneurship and promoting cooperation with financial institutions and the private sector in line with the Youth, Peace and Security agenda
- prioritize the inclusion of women and youth as key actors in preventing extremism leading to terrorism.

***Harnessing Engines for Sustainable Peace and Development:
Trade, Infrastructure and Sustainable Energy***

The COVID-19 experience has accentuated the need to invest in key economic sectors to strengthen government and society resilience against systemic risks and the related security repercussions. Infrastructure, digitalization, trade and sustainable energy are prime engines for service provision, including the delivery of education, healthcare, water and sanitation services. As such, to improve Africa’s resilience, investing in its two economic integration arms, human capabilities and infrastructure, is crucial:

Towards this end, African governments, the AU, RECs/RMs, the private sector and financial institutions are invited to:

- accelerate the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement to (i) bolster the resilience of African economies and societies against future crises, and (ii) strengthen the contribution of trade to sustainable peace and security efforts
- broaden the scope of infrastructure (beyond transportation and basic utilities) towards digitalization and artificial intelligence as new frontiers for inclusive peace and development
- invest in the industrialization of African economies while adopting a fragility lens to assess and respond to the vulnerabilities of institutions and populations
- address Africa’s fourth debt wave by strengthening domestic revenue mobilization and tax governance mechanisms, as well as urge the international community to relax debt burdens on African governments (by adopting debt cancellation measures or extending the suspension of debt payments, particularly in light of the additional socioeconomic and fiscal pressures resulting from the pandemic)

- foster a greener and smarter recovery by increasing investments in sustainable energy and digitalization as well as integrating environmental considerations in national policies and strategies
- further develop policies and regulations to de-risk the investment environment and attract international development actors and private sector participation to deliver critical projects and services to meet the needs of at-risk populations.

Operationalizing the Nexus Approach:

Working Together in the Face of the Global Pandemic and Other Systemic Risks

The pandemic has further crystalized the inextricable link between humanitarian affairs, development, and peace in Africa, as highlighted in the conclusions of the first Aswan Forum. As such, applying a nexus angle when addressing structural weaknesses and systemic risks across the continent is crucial. While progress has been made at the strategic level, the nexus approach has not been well-incorporated at the operational level. A case in point is the COVID-19 response.

In light of this complex reality, African governments, the AU as well as RECs/RMs and their international partners are encouraged to:

- accelerate the adoption of an integrated and coordinated approach across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus—both within and among national governments and organizations—to effectively address the multi-faceted and complex drivers of violence and armed conflict.

Scaling-Up Financing for Sustainable Peace and Development

The magnitude of the complex, multidimensional and evolving drivers of fragility, armed conflict and violence reaffirm the need for tailored, flexible and high-impact financing for sustainable peace and development that leverages pillars of resilience.

As such, African governments, the AU and their regional and international partners are invited to:

- establish a continental financial stabilization mechanism to provide assistance to member states grappling with financial shocks
- ensure the allocation of predictable and sustained funding through innovative, flexible and catalytic financing that addresses the root causes of conflict, supports peace processes and PCRD efforts

- diversify funding sources for sustainable peace and development through various financing actors, including the private sector, international and regional financial institutions, trust funds and investment banks
- scale up financing at all levels for climate adaptation and resilience, including through devising innovative financing mechanisms to accelerate resource mobilization and incentivize the engagement of unconventional financing actors, including the private sector
- increase financial and political support to the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), which also serves as a reflection of solidarity and political will to achieve the Sustaining Peace agenda
- further develop financing modalities to ensure that the AU Peace Fund is capable of responding to peacebuilding and PCRD priorities on the continent.

Fostering Partnerships Towards a Strong Recovery and Structural Transformation in a Post COVID-19 Africa

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the importance of fortifying partnerships to strengthen the resilience of African states. There is a heightened need to reconfigure partnership modalities to create more space for regional and sub-regional organizations to develop comprehensive and regional solutions. Partnerships should strive to be impact-driven with greater emphasis on creating interlinkages and synergies to ensure that different strategies and interventions are effective in capturing and addressing the complex challenges on the ground. In this regard, the international community, especially development actors, needs to accompany African states' efforts to solidify social cohesion and hone institutional capacities.

Against this backdrop, African governments, the AU, and regional and international partners are urged to:

- advance multi-stakeholder partnerships in support of priorities set out by African governments and guided by the humanitarian-peace-development nexus approach as well as context-specific strategies whereby humanitarian, development and peace actors align and synergize their engagements
- strengthen cooperation between the AU and the UN, particularly in identifying specific areas of intervention grounded in realistic timeframes, in order to achieve incremental breakthroughs in the Silencing the Guns agenda until the end of the decade
- ensure that partnerships foster country-led responses that advance national priorities and effective national ownership
- strengthen REC/RM capacities in developing regional and sub-regional context-specific responses



Leveraging Arts, Culture and Heritage for a Peaceful and Prosperous Africa

The AU Agenda 2063 envisions an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics. The celebration of 2021 as the AU Year of the Arts, Culture and Heritage provides a valuable opportunity to examine means of strengthening the contribution of arts, culture and heritage to sustaining peace and development in Africa. In this regard, through education and intercultural dialogue, a culture of peace can significantly contribute to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and the promotion of solidarity between communities and countries. As such, the nexus between culture, peace and development is key for the promotion of a peaceful and prosperous in Africa.

To operationalize this nexus, African governments and the AU are invited to:

- create a network between all institutions and experts working on issues of culture, heritage, peace and development to share experiences and best practices
- develop synergies between relevant forums such as the Biennale of Luanda: Pan-African Forum for the Culture of Peace and the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development.

Africa in a New Era of Multilateralism

It is increasingly evident that no country or region can single-handedly deal with the health, economic and climate change crises the world is facing. That, in itself, is an incentive to reinvigorate multilateralism. In addition, there is a dire need for more effective global governance in response to public health emergencies.

To achieve this, African governments and the AU are invited to:

- actively contribute to shaping a reinvigorated multilateralism at the international level that is better equipped to respond to overlapping and interconnected new challenges and threats.
- address new and emerging risks to sustainable peace and security such as climate change and its effects. The AU PSC must lead the continental efforts in this context while ensuring Africa's ownership of its peace and security agenda
