

The AU at Twenty Years: Institutional Changes, Contestation, and Consolidation

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ABSTRACTS

The African Union (AU) is embarking into its second decade and it is apt to assess the institutional changes it has experienced in terms of its internal reforms, and by extension the contestations and limitations that persist in terms of the body's efforts to promote peace, security, governance, trade as well as improving the livelihood of its constituent peoples. This chapter will assess the challenges posed by the drive to reform the African Union Commission, as well as the persistent challenge of consolidating and sustaining peace across the continent. The chapter will also assess the contestations emerging from efforts to implement the provisions of the African Union Transitional Justice Policy, mitigate against the spread of Covid-19, and discuss the opportunities consolidating regional integration, which have been provided by the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) and the AU Protocol on the Free Movement of People. The chapter will conclude by emphasising the importance of citizen participation in revitalising the spirit of Pan-Africanism and in contributing towards ongoing efforts to consolidate peace and promote regional integration, in line with the self-defined aspirations as outlined in the Agenda 2063.

Die Afrikanische Union (AU) tritt in ihr zweites Jahrzehnt ein, und es ist angebracht, die institutionellen Veränderungen zu bewerten, die sie in Bezug auf ihre internen Reformen erfahren hat, und damit auch die Anfechtungen und Einschränkungen, die in Bezug auf die Bemühungen der Organisation um die Förderung von Frieden, Sicherheit, Regierungsführung, Handel sowie die Verbesserung der Lebensbedingungen der ihr angehörenden Völker fortbestehen. In diesem Kapitel werden die Herausforderungen bewertet, die sich durch die Reform der Kommission der Afrikanischen Union ergeben, sowie die anhaltende Herausforderung, den Frieden auf dem gesamten Kontinent zu konsolidieren und zu erhalten. Das Kapitel wird auch die Anfechtungen bewerten, die sich aus den Bemühungen ergeben, die Bestimmungen der Politik

der Afrikanischen Union im Bereich der Übergangsgerechtigkeit umzusetzen, die Ausbreitung von Covid-19 einzudämmen und die Möglichkeiten zur Konsolidierung der regionalen Integration zu erörtern, die sich durch die Afrikanische Kontinentale Freihandelszone (ACFTA) und das AU-Protokoll über die Freizügigkeit von Personen ergeben haben. Abschließend wird die Bedeutung der Bürgerbeteiligung für die Wiederbelebung des panafrikanischen Geistes und den Beitrag zu den laufenden Bemühungen um die Konsolidierung des Friedens und die Förderung der regionalen Integration im Einklang mit den selbst definierten Zielen der Agenda 2063 betont.

1. Introduction

The African Union (AU) is embarking into its third decade, and it is apt to assess the institutional changes it has experienced in terms of its internal reforms, and by extension the contestations and limitations that persist in terms of the body's efforts to promote peace, security, governance, and the improving the livelihood of its constituent peoples. It is also worthwhile to explore the opportunities for consolidating Pan-Africanism and building upon the gains that the AU has achieved over the last twenty years in terms of promoting transitional justice, mitigating against Covid-19, and enhancing continental trade as a pathway to deepening regional integration. The African Union's *Agenda 2063* identifies one of its objectives as the pursuit of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena".¹ The AU's 20-year trajectory suggests that there are significant challenges and opportunities for Africa to strive to realize its full potential in terms of consolidating peace and development, through the cultivating culture of Pan-African solidarity and self-determination, as envisioned in Agenda 2063. The 20-year landmark of the AU provides a timely opportunity to assess what it will take to establish a flourishing, inclusive, and prosperous Pan-African society. In particular, it will assess how the AU can leverage the opportunities to further enhance regional integration in order to deepen Pan-African consciousness and solidarity. In addition, this chapter will assess how Agenda 2063 provides a pre-determined blueprint for how Africa can re-imagining and reinvent itself in a post-Corona world and achieve its objectives of a prosperous and integrated continent. This contribution will also assess the challenges posed by the drive to reform the African Union Commission (AUC), as well as the persistent challenge of consolidating and sustaining peace across the continent. The article will also interrogate the contestations emerging from efforts to implement the provisions of the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP). In addition, it will discuss the AU's role in contributing towards the mitigation of the spread of Covid-19 in the early part of the second decade. Furthermore, the article will assess the opportunities consolidating regional integration, which have been provided by the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) and the AU Protocol on the Free Movement of People, to enhance cross-border entrepreneurship,

1 African Union, Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want. Framework Document, Addis Ababa: African Union Commission, September 2015, §4.

trade, and cultural exchanges as a means of fostering a deeper sense of Pan-Africanism. The article will conclude by emphasizing the importance of citizen participation in these ongoing efforts to consolidate peace and promote regional integration, if Africa is to indeed fulfil its self-defined aspirations as outlined in the Agenda 2063.

2. Pan-Africanism and the African Union in Transition

The first twenty years of the African Union have witnessed the normative and policy efforts to revive the spirit of Pan-Africanism, which should be accelerated as the body embarks on to the next phase of its institutional journey. In normative terms, Pan-Africanism is the expression of this spirit of solidarity and cooperation among African countries and societies. The initial and primary aim of Pan-Africanism, encapsulated in the vision and mission of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), established in 1963, was to end racial discrimination against people of African descent including those in the diaspora. In the twentieth century, Pan-Africanism was postulated by African intellectuals, scholars, politicians, and citizens as a necessary pre-requisite for creating the conditions that are vital to protect their right of Africans to take part and control their social, economic, and political affairs and achieve peace and development. Consequently, the twenty-first century is witnessing the evolution of Pan-Africanism, notably through the constitution and establishment of the African Union.

In its first 20 years of existence, the African Union has made some initial practical efforts to address continental challenges and to function as an international actor. The major problem facing the AU is the lack of integrity among some of the leaders of her member states, who on paper have committed themselves to principles, norms, and shared values of human rights and democratic governance, but continue to practice suppression, dominion, and exploitation of their own people. In terms of its limitations, not all of Africa's heads of state and government are taking the African Union seriously. The Pan-African norms and values that they have signed up should be enough to encourage them to change their behaviour. However, many leaders continue to behave as though the AU does not exist by ruling in an autocratic manner and even committing human rights atrocities with impunity in their own countries. These malpractices of misrule in turn fuels the escalation of political tension and conflict which further retards the continent's efforts to address its security, governance, development, and trade challenges.

3. The African Union's Institutional Changes and Internal Reforms

In January 2017, the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted a report entitled *The Imperative to Strengthen our Union: Report on the Proposed Recommendations for the Institutional Reform of the African Union*.² This report was compiled by presi-

2 P. Kagame, *The Imperative to Strengthen our Union: Report on the Proposed Recommendations for the Institutional Reform of the African Union*, Addis Ababa 2017.

dent Paul Kagame of Rwanda, with the collaboration of a panel of senior African states women and men, in response to a decision “on the need to conduct a study on the institutional reform of the African Union” the which emerged from a retreat of heads of state and government, ministers of foreign affairs and ministers of finance, which was held in Kigali, Rwanda, on 16 July 2017.³ The Kagame Panel Report observed that “as unprecedented challenges multiply and spread across the globe at a dizzying pace, new vulnerabilities are increasingly laid bare, in rich and poor nations alike”.⁴ In particular, the report identifies a number of issues including “climate change, violent extremist ideologies, disease pandemics, or mass migration” as among some of the key issues that urgently need to be addressed “by focused and effective regional organisations”.⁵ The Kagame Panel Report laments that “the unfortunate truth is that Africa today is ill-prepared to adequately respond to current events, because *the African Union still has to be made fit for purpose*”.⁶ This is a forthright and honest appraisal of the state of the African Union a decade and a half after it was launched with much fanfare and great expectations in 2002, in Durban, South Africa.

A key issue of contestation during the first two decades of its existence, was the AU’s limited ability to assert itself on the international stage, due its reliance and dependency on donors to pay salaries and finance its operations and programmes. The former Chairperson of the AU Commission, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma (South Africa), who served from 2012 to 2016, was consistent during her tenure in voicing her grave concern about the extent to which the AU system as a whole was dependent on external donors to run some its core functions and to maintain vital staff within its departments. Throughout its early existence this remained a perennial challenge for both the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the complementary African Governance Architecture (AGA) and has raised questions about the true “ownership” of Africa’s institutions. In July 2016, the AU Assembly adopted a decision on Financing of the Union, to institute a 0.2 per cent levy on eligible imports.⁷ The importance of this decision was subsequently reiterated in a report entitled *Securing Predictable and Sustainable Funding for Peace in Africa*, which was compiled by the Donald Kaberuka, the AU High Representative for the Peace Fund.⁸ This decision represented the first genuine attempt to wean the Union and its institutions off its donors, particularly in the sphere of promoting peace. Such initiatives would in theory place the AU on a path to self-sovereignty and autonomy

3 African Union, Decision on the Institutional Reform of the African Union. Adopted at the Retreat of Heads of State and Government, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ministers of Finance held in Kigali, Rwanda, on 16 July 2017. Assembly/AU/Dec.606 (XXVII).

4 Kagame, The Imperative to Strengthen our Union, p. 3.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 3f.

7 African Union, Decision on Financing of the Union. Adopted at the 27th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly held in Kigali, Rwanda, on 17–18 July 2016, Assembly/AU/Dec.605 (XXVII).

8 D. Kaberuka, *Securing Predictable and Sustainable Funding for Peace in Africa*, Addis Ababa: African Union Peace Fund, July 2016, p. 39.

from external predilections and reverse the perception and insinuation that the AU is not “owned” by Africa.

4. Agenda 2063 as a Blueprint for Africa’s Future

In January 2015, the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted the Agenda 2063 Framework Document.⁹ This document outlined the organization’s forward planning strategy for the next 50 years. In its Agenda 2063 Framework Document, the AU outlined a transformation programme for the next 50 years, including seven aspirations:¹⁰

- i) a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development;
- ii) an integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance;
- iii) an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law;
- iv) a peaceful and secure Africa;
- v) an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics;
- vi) an Africa where development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and well cared for children;
- vii) Africa as a strong, united and influential global player and partner.

The intention is to implement Agenda 2063 through a series of successive phases, intermediate benchmarks, and time-bound targets of achievement, in partnership with the REC’s, civil society, international partners, and the private sector. Agenda 2063 is a forward-looking document, and it is therefore timeously designed to provide a roadmap the pathway for a post-Corona African future. Specifically, this section will briefly assess the aspirations stipulated in Agenda 2063 in terms of the pursuit of an “integrated, peaceful, and prosperous” continent, which is driven by its own citizens. In this regard, this section will identify the practical pathways that can be charted towards.

The African continent is afflicted by a crisis of identity and is still plagued by deep seated euro-centric civilizational agendas, which infiltrated its governance, economic, educational, and societal systems, and which were un-critically adopted by a sector of Africa’s political and economic elite. In fact, most African countries are more aptly defined by the degree of colonial continuity. The imposition of the nation-state presaged its subsequent malformation and failure to deliver on the public goods, which are expected

9 African Union, Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want.

10 Ibid., p. 2.

of state constructs.¹¹ Specifically, African nation-states were, and remain, programmed with the colonial logic of control, dominion, dehumanization, subjugation, oppression, exploitation, and manipulation. In alignment with global trends, there was a resurgence of ethnic nationalism, xenophobia, gender-based violence, and religious extremism in several countries across Africa.

The pursuit of political integration as stipulated in Agenda 2063, through the internalization of a commitment to constitutionalism, democratic governance, cross-border trade, and the free movement of people is a necessary corrective to the legacy of the colonially imposed state structures. Political integration through the coalescing of regional economic communities such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the East African Community (EAC) both of which have issued passports for their citizens, is an important vehicle for promoting regional integration and transcending the constraining straight-jacket of state sovereignty, which is hampering Africa's growth and evolution.

5. Contestations Relating to the AU's Peace, Security and Governance Initiatives

Africa has endured the debilitating effects of cyclical violent conflict for several decades. Despite the existence of well-intentioned policy frameworks and the utilization of significant resources to stabilize countries, conflicts in the region have remained resistant to resolution (see also the article by Gilbert M. Khadiagala in this issue). The United Nations (UN) definition of peacebuilding as “a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict” and laying “the foundations for sustainable peace and development”.¹² Peacebuilding includes the dimension of promoting reconciliation which is a future-oriented process, even though it seeks to remedy the violations of the past, it is predicated on the construction of a new future for the victims, perpetrators, and the wider community.

From the outset, the AU elaborated a robust policy framework to address a broad range of continental challenges including those relating to security, governance, and development. For example, the principles of the 2002 *Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union* stipulate a commitment towards promoting the “peaceful settlement of disputes and conflicts” as well as ensuring the “respect for the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedoms”.¹³ Subsequently, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) was established in 2004, with the mandate to coordinate the peace-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding efforts on the continent. The PSC

11 See B. Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, London 1992.

12 United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, *Peacebuilding and the United Nations*, 2022, <http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding7pbso/pbun.shtml> (accessed 1 February 2023).

13 African Union, *Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union*, Addis Ababa: African Union, paras (a) and 4(c).

Protocol enumerated the APSA, which includes a Panel of the Wise, composed of five eminent African personalities. As part of APSA, the AU authorized the establishment of an African Standby Force (ASF), a Military Staff Committee (MSC) will provide advice on deployment and security requirements. The PSC Protocol also established the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) and an AU Peace Fund. Specifically, in case of “grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity”, the AU Assembly has the mandate to authorize AU interventions in member states.¹⁴ In its period of operations, the Council has demonstrated its ability to draw attention to crisis situations in Africa and will continue to function as one of the most important powerful organs of Africa’s evolving peace and security architecture. However, the Council still has a lot to do to adopt a culture of prevention and proactive interventionism in situations of potential mass atrocities.

The African Union Commission’s *Strategic Plan 2009–2012*, which was approved by the AU Assembly, provided the AU Commission with a mandate to achieve good governance, democracy, human rights. In February 2010, at the 14th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly committed the Union towards establishing a Pan-African Architecture on Governance, subsequently established as the African Governance Architecture (AGA).¹⁵ The intention was not to create a new institution but to enhance coordination among AU organs and institutions with the formal mandate for governance, democracy, and human rights. However, the emphasis in creating this architecture was that member states would continue to have the primary responsibility of building and consolidating governance based on the recognition that a strong and effective AGA requires solid, functioning, and accountable national structures. Subsequently, the AU has established the AGA Platform with a secretariat within its then Department of Political Affairs as the central coordinating mechanism for monitoring compliance and implementation of agreed governance standards as embodied in the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG).¹⁶ The way in which the AGA Platform was conceived and structured as a coordinating, rather than executing mechanism means that it necessarily had to foster close collaboration and synergy between the AU’s institutions which have a formal mandate to promote governance, democracy, and human rights.

A security approach is necessary, but not sufficient for the gradual stabilization of societies and regions across the continent. The challenging work of winning the hearts and minds of local populations through the transformation of societies through governance is an equally important and vital complement to the security initiatives in these war-affected regions. The cyclical nature of conflict points to the critical need to move beyond temporary stalemates and ceasefires, peacekeeping deployments and military operations, that are so common in this era, towards a regional policy informed by intentionally con-

14 OAU, Constitutive Act of the African Union, Lomé: Organization of African Unity, para. 4(h).

15 AU Assembly, Decision on the Prevention of Unconstitutional Changes of Government and Strengthening the Capacity of the African Union to Manage such Situations. Adopted at 14th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 31 January–2 February 2010, Assembly/AU/Dec.269 (XIV) Rev.1.

16 African Union, Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, Addis Ababa 2007.

fronting the underlying grievances that have fuelled decades of animosity and violence on the continent.

Despite having been operational for more than 20 years, there was a persistent and recurring challenge relating to the troubled nexus between peacekeeping, peacebuilding, governance, and socio-economic transformation at the institutional level within the AU. This phenomenon also replicates itself at the United Nations, so it is not unique to Africa. Specifically, there was a lack of effective institutional interface at the level of decision-making. While all African Union staff members were singing from the same song sheet of inter-departmental collaboration, and despite efforts to initiate concrete activities to operationalize this rhetorical harmony, the effects on the ground in terms of APSA and AGA interventions were not translating into a coordinated strategy to deliver as one to the victims and survivors of war and injustice.

This lack of effective APSA and AGA inter-face revealed the perils of actualizing inter-departmental collaboration on the ground. Well-intentioned platitudes at the policy and decision-making levels, about the urgency of promoting synergy between peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and governance processes became routine and banal. Consequently, this created a silo effect when it came to the interventions, with the AU peacekeepers, peacebuilders, governance and development practitioners virtually operating in isolation from each other, even when they were in the same in-country mission. The AU came to realize that implementing effective peacebuilding and transitional justice processes was a necessary pre-requisite to any exit strategy for a military intervention.

6. Consolidating Peace through the Promotion of Continental Transitional Justice

In February 2019, the AU Assembly formally adopted the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP), which outlines a broad range of processes for addressing the legacies of past violations and mechanisms for building inclusive societies.¹⁷ The AU's adoption of this policy is a unique innovation, as it is the first time in its history that the African continent has enumerated and institutionalized its own approach to addressing the past, as a necessary pathway to building more inclusive and stable societies in the future. In 2010, at the inception of the technical development of the AUTJP, civil society actors were closely involved in working with the then AUC Department of Political Affairs to provide technical support and input that led to the formal adoption of the AUTJP. In the intervening period since its adoption, it is evident that a significant number of governmental and societal actors in AU member states have not fully engaged and implemented the Policy at the national level. Similarly, regional economic communities (RECs) have not sufficiently engaged with the AUTJP and developed their own regional

17 African Union, African Union Transitional Justice Policy, Addis Ababa 2019. See also African Union, African Union Transitional Justice Framework (AUTJF), Addis Ababa 2016.

strategies to advise and guide their member states, which can contribute towards stabilising their countries and forging more inclusive and democratic societies. The formal adoption of the AUTJP provided a framework to engage national governments, regional economic communities, civil society networks, analysts, and other stakeholders on the importance of implementing processes that will contribute towards sustaining peace and security in Africa.

The AUTJP essentially illustrates the link between transitional justice, peacebuilding, and security, specifically relating to the connection between bringing together former enemies in a process of sustained dialogue, ensuring redress for past wrongs, as a pathway towards developing a common vision to shape a new, inclusive future. Furthermore, the AUTJP demonstrates that transitional justice is now understood as involving a broad spectrum of interventions that are embedded in peacebuilding and developmental processes. Over the last 20 years, a number of African countries have adopted and implemented transitional justice processes and designed institutions to guide their national processes, such as in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, and Uganda. In addition, some countries are still deeply affected by crises and have not even attempted to establish the necessary transitional justice frameworks at the national level to guide their in-country processes, such as the sectarian crisis in Cameroon, as well as the escalation of violent extremism in northern Mozambique's Cabo Delgado region. Furthermore, there is a need to further stabilise the situation in countries such as the Central African Republic (CAR), the Tigray region of Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mali, South Sudan, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, which have attempted to implement fledgling transitional justice processes. In some instances, African countries need to establish new institutions to promote and sustain national reconciliation, such as in Lesotho, Libya, and Somalia which continues to be affected by instability despite the long-standing AU presence in the country.

6.1 Engaging regions and citizens

The AU has a track-record of the non-implementation of its broad range of policy documents, which is why the AUTJP anticipates this challenge and dedicates the whole of Section Four of the Policy to identify "Actors, Processes and Implementation Mechanisms".¹⁸ Specifically, the AUTJP identifies four actors who should take responsibility for its implementation including:

- i) AU member states;
- ii) Regional Economic Communities (RECs);
- iii) AU institutions; and
- iv) Non-state actors, including members of civil society.¹⁹

18 African Union, African Union Transitional Justice Policy, section 4.

19 African Union, African Union Transitional Justice Policy, pp. 25–26.

Concretely, the AUTJP states that AU “member states shall have the primary responsibility with respect for pursuing transitional justice processes” and that “they bear the responsibility for removing political and social impediments to the effective pursuit of transitional justice processes”.²⁰ The AUTJP also stipulates that member states have the responsibility for “guaranteeing the space for debate and advocacy on transitional justice and mobilising the support of all sections of society across political lines”.²¹ The AUTJP is an outcome of process that recognized the right of citizens to participate in framing transitional justice processes, specifically in the manner that it solicited and engaged the views of Africans across the continent. The AUTJP is framed in a manner that preemptively acknowledges that there will be inherent resistance from governments when it comes to genuinely confronting the violations and injustices that were perpetrated in the past and putting in place processes that will address grievances as a means of preventing the cyclical recurrence of tension and conflict in societies. The AUTJP anticipates that governments may not readily create and sustain societal spaces for African citizens to engage with issues relating to transitional justice, evident on its appeal to state actors to remove political and social obstacles as well as to commit to “guaranteeing space for debate and advocacy”.²² Therefore, AU member states should adopt strategies that will facilitate national dialogue on transitional justice, in an open and inclusive manner. AU member states should also adopt strategies that can domesticate the provisions of the AUTJP into national legislatures and embed its recommended processes within permanent national institutions so as to ensure the sustainability of transitional justice initiatives at the national level. In effect, the AUTJP places a significant amount of responsibility on AU member states to oversee, plan, and execute the implementation of the Policy. The AUTJP also states that “regional economic communities (RECs) should encourage all national actors to pursue transitional justice processes”.²³ In terms of the continental level, it calls for “key AU organs and institutions to provide leadership in the implementation of the AUTJP, including the African Union Commission” as well as the “AU Peace and Security Council, African Court of Human and Peoples Rights, African Development Bank, African Capacity Building Foundation” and the Pan-African Parliament.²⁴ At the societal level, the AUTJP states that “civil society members, community-based organisations and the media should campaign for and facilitate the emergence of the necessary public national conversations and debates on pursuing transitional justice processes”.²⁵ Furthermore, the Policy stipulates that “provision should be made for enabling these and other actors to play their role in creating forums for the documenting and reporting on transitional justice processes”.²⁶ In effect, the AUTJP recognises the

20 Ibid., p. 25f.

21 Ibid., p. 25.

22 Ibid., p. 26.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., p. 25.

25 Ibid., p. 26.

26 Ibid.

central role that African citizens will play in pursuing and sustaining the implementation of transitional justice processes at the communal, national, and regional levels. In this regard, there is the need for the creation and support of a continental network of transitional justice practitioners and analysts who can provide technical support and guidance to all of the continent's 55 countries all of which require some form of intervention, if they have not already implemented a national process of addressing the past as a means of sustaining peace in the future.

Despite the existence of these clearly demarcated roles for governments, inter-governmental, and civil society actors, the AUTJP has not been fully engaged with by a significant number of African countries, and it is currently not being sufficiently utilized by AU member states to guide their own internal transitional justice and peacebuilding processes. The uptake for the AUTJP has faltered, particularly due to the unprecedented pressures that the Covid-19 pandemic imposed upon governments and societies in terms of mitigating against the effects of the virus and addressing its effect on society and economic well-being across the continent. Covid-19 also fuelled and deepened trauma as it amplified the already existing inequality and poverty on the African continent. The AUTJP can be utilized in combination with socio-economic programmes to alleviate the psychosocial effects of the pandemic and strengthen the inherent ability of African citizens to rebuild their societies and countries.

6.2 Mainstreaming regional reconciliation and the AUTJP

The formal adoption of the African Union Transitional Justice Policy, in February 2019, has given the continent a common framework which provides a point of reference for countries to develop their own national and regional processes of addressing the grievances of the past as the most effective pathway to sustain peace in the future.²⁷ Transitional justice processes pursue this objective through determining the truth of past violations, and establishing processes to administer restorative and retributive justice as well as promote the institutional reform of political, judicial, and security institutions. One of the cumulative effects of the implementation of transitional justice processes is the gradual promotion of reconciliation within the target society. Therefore, reconciliation is a forward-looking process which seeks to contribute towards the formation of equal, inclusive and fair societies.

Africa's crises demonstrate that conflicts tend to spill across borders, affecting communities in more than one country. These cases challenge the reductionist understandings of traditional inter-state and intra-state wars across the continent. The regional nature of conflicts means that the notion of "civil war" is anachronistic, with increasingly limited descriptive utility. Intra-state conflicts, more often than not, have an inter-state and regional dimension in the way that they are resourced and executed.²⁸ Studies show that

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See *Comparativ* 28 (2018) 6: special issue on Africa's Transregional Conflicts, ed. by Ulf Engel.

more than half of violent conflicts in Africa can be linked to conflicts in neighbouring states, conflicts do not stop at the border, but in fact spill over, and these linkages are evident in a range of interconnected political, socio-economic, and cultural factors.²⁹ Historically interventions to promote reconciliation have been overly state-focused and unable to address the cross-border dimensions of conflict in Africa. State-centric security interventions – such as conflict management and peace enforcement operations – that merely address the symptoms rather than the deeper causes of Africa's conflicts. Even more self-defeating, cross-border, and joint peace and security operations focus resources on military operations – such as those pursuing Boko Haram, Al Shabaab, or the South Sudan conflict system. These state-centric and over-militarized approaches overlook the structural origins of conflict that manifest themselves so violently across borders.³⁰ Military operations are only a temporary stop-gap measure for containing violence and are ultimately doomed to fail. Ultimately, reconciliation processes which address the violations of the past as a pre-requisite for laying the foundation for future coexistence is necessary for stability in the post-Corona era. Specifically, “transnational conflicts that form mutually reinforcing linkages with each other across state borders” suggests that these regional linkages are so strong and interdependent, that a change in dynamics in one conflict often affects neighbouring ones.³¹ Furthermore, networks of interdependence are evident in the cross-border supply routes for arms, illicit trade, and human trafficking. In some instance, co-ethnic groups living in different countries can serve as network for this illicit trade which can contribute towards fueling conflicts.

Case studies from across the continent have provided insights into the regionalization of violent conflict and how this can generate new disputes and enflame pre-existing tensions. For instance, the Rwandan genocide, often viewed in isolation, is a contributing and exacerbating factor to the conflicts and violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the tense security situation on Burundi's borders.³² Similarly, the conflict system generated by the crisis in South Sudan has had a spill-over effect into Northern Uganda and Kenya, as well as affect the Horn of African region in terms of the displacement of victims and survivors. The protracted political tension in Zimbabwe as well as the emergence of violent extremism in Mozambique, has precipitated refugee flows into neighbouring countries, which has implications for the regional stability of Southern Africa.

In effect, Africa's conflicts function through regional conflict systems, and strategies deployed to confront them need to adopt a regional approach. As discussed above the Great Lakes, Horn of Africa, and Lake Chad Basin, regional conflict systems are notoriously difficult to stabilize, because state actors are not adopting coordinated regional strategies

29 G. Maina/W. Razia, *The Mano River Union: Regional Peacebuilding – A Collective Initiative by Various Actors*, in: *New Routes: A Journal of Peace Research and Action* (2012) 17, pp. 20–23.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., p. 21.

32 D. Zounmenou/N. Kok, *Between War and Peace in the Eastern DR Congo*, in: *New Routes: A Journal of Peace Research and Action* (2012) 17, pp. 31–32.

to promote and consolidate peace.³³ Since conflicts, atrocities, and violations straddle borders, regional reconciliation processes have to be convened across borders. This would require implementing processes of truth recovery, accountability and redress across borders as preliminary processes to the pursuit of regional reconciliation.³⁴ In addition, this includes processes that provide transboundary psychosocial support and trauma processing among war-affected victims and survivors of gender-based violence, as a pathway to healing and the improvement of their well-being. These are cross-border processes for which we do not have any precedent at the level of Africa's international relations, and in particular with regards to the implementation of Pan-African transitional justice and reconciliation interventions. Therefore, we also need to consider which actors may be best placed to implement such processes.

Formal regional reconciliation processes would be facilitated by the state. Typically, state institutions would be utilized in promoting regional reconciliation across borders. These institutions would derive their legitimacy, and hence formality, from the authority of the sovereign states that constitute them. Formal regional reconciliation processes could be facilitated by the state or by inter-governmental bodies, such as the IGAD, EAC, or other regional bodies like the African Union. These institutions would derive their legitimacy, and hence formality, from the authority of the sovereign states that constitute them.

Informal regional reconciliation processes would operate outside state structures. This would include civil society interventions in regional reconciliation. In addition, the diaspora can also play a role in actively participating and supporting regional reconciliation initiatives. Typically, informal regional reconciliation processes can complement the more formal process, and ideally, they should proceed without the sanction and imprimatur of the affected states. In practice, state-actors will want to be informed of potential informal regional reconciliation process due to their claim of sovereignty over their territory.

A key challenge in implementing regional reconciliation will be the persistent tendency to seek recourse and to retreat into the cocoon of state sovereignty. Despite the consistent rhetoric by Africa's leaders about the importance of regional integration, the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA), the pending adoption of the African Union Protocol on the Free Movement of People, and the prospective issuing of an African Union Passport to all citizens, means that a retreat into the shield of state sovereignty is a short-sighted posture, which will ultimately be self-defeating in a post-pandemic globalized world. It is evident that the notion of regional reconciliation needs to be further developed in order to advance our understanding of how to frame and operationalize efforts to achieve sustainable peace and security in Africa, fulfil the provisions of Agenda 2063.

33 Maina/Razira, The Manu River Union.

34 T. Murithi/L. McClain Opiyo, *Regional Reconciliation in Africa: Policy Recommendations for Cross-border Transitional Justice*, Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (= Policy Brief No. 14), April 2014.

7. African Continental Free Trade Area and the Free Movement of People

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a logical outgrowth of the vision enshrined in Agenda 2063. The unfortunate reality is that intra-continental trade in Africa is comparatively lower than other regions of the world, such as Southeast Asia and Latin America, and is currently located at approximately 16–17 per cent of all of Africa's exports and imports.³⁵ According to the African Union, the AfCFTA is a flagship project of Agenda 2063 which “aims to significantly accelerate growth of Intra-Africa trade and use trade more effectively as an engine of growth and sustainable development by doubling intra-Africa trade, strengthening Africa's common voice and policy space in global trade negotiations”.³⁶ The AfCFTA, which was formally launched during the 12th Extra-ordinary Summit of the African Union Heads of State and Government, held in Niamey, Niger, on 7 June 2019, is expected to create a wider market of more than 1.2 billion people with a combined GDP of USD 2 trillion.

The AfCFTA is gradually being operationalized and the Secretariat based in Accra, Ghana, has been established. As one joint Afrobarometer research study, done in collaboration with the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, suggests “it is possible in the coming decade that the African Continental Free Trade Agreement may facilitate enhanced intra-continental mobility”.³⁷

The gradual emergence of a common regional identity, which would be further reinforced by activities such as cross-border trade, entrepreneurship, trans-boundary industrial and agrarian programmes, as well as collaboration on the development of services such as access to water, electricity, and the development of infrastructure. The formal adoption and operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area can now be leveraged to enhance the development of common markets and the establishment of cross-border links through road and air transport would further lead to greater regional travel, migration, and cultural exchange. At the 27th AU Assembly, convened in Kigali, the African Union issued an AU Passport to presidents, ministers, and ambassadors.

The prospective ratification and harmonization of the African Union Protocol on the Free Movement of People, would provide African citizens with opportunities to increase their engagement in cross-border travel, trade, and cultural exchanges.³⁸ This would in turn contribute positively to the growth of small and medium sized enterprises (SME's) which are vital to the agenda of confronting the debilitating effects of inequality, poverty, and unemployment.

35 African Union, Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, Addis Ababa: African Union, 2018. On the process of implementation, see B. Byiers, Regional Integration and Trade, in: U. Engel (ed.), Yearbook on the African Union. Vol. 2 (2021), Leiden/Boston 2022, pp. 179–202.

36 African Union, Flagship Projects of Agenda 2063, <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/flagship-projects> (accessed 1 February 2023).

37 J. Sanny/C. Rocca/I. Schultes, Updating the Narrative About African Migration, Accra: Afrobarometer and Mo Ibrahim Foundation Joint Research Paper, November 2020, p. 9.

38 African Union, Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment, Addis Ababa 2018.

This illustrates that there are parallel processes unfolding on continent, which are already designed to re-conceptualize political community in Africa.³⁹ However, it is clear that these institutions are currently at various levels of development both within the African Union as well as within the regional economic communities which are distributed across all of Africa's regions. To further reinforce the reconceptualization of political community which the African Union is driving through the issuing of AU passports, in line with ECOWAS and EAC already issuing passports, there is a compelling case for the continental body and the RECs to accelerate its implementation of Agenda 2063, as a pathway towards advancing its transition towards defined by the increased prosperity and well-being of its population.

8. Covid-19 as a Catalyst for Deepening and Consolidating Pan-Africanism

The devastating and wide-range effects of the Covid-19 pandemic presented the African Union with its most significant public health challenge in its twenty years of existence. In early 2020, Covid-19 caused the disruption of human society on a continental and global scale. The disease does not discriminate against its victims on the basis of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, culture, religion, or financial affluence, and it has fuelled global pandemonium. As an initial reaction to Covid-19, African governments called on their citizens to retreat within national borders, closed off international travel, and instituted militarized physical distancing lockdowns in order to “combat” the disease. The African Union was one of the few continental organizations to recognize that the only way to combat Covid-19, was not from behind the artificial borders that were imposed upon the African continent by colonialism, rather the AU relied on the collective ingenuity of its members to coral the whole of the Pan-African society into working as one unit to confront the challenges it faced as well as to lay the foundations for the addressing the residual effects of Covid-19.⁴⁰ The emergence of Covid-19 in effect became a call to Pan-African society to work in tandem, with global partners, to decipher its nature, and to find the means to mitigate against its effects on society, government, and industry. In effect, Covid-19 through its indiscriminate attack on all people was a wake-up call to our essential unity as human beings. The initial nation-state centric response to Covid-19 was a necessary palliative to confine the spread of the virus. However, while state-based responses were necessary at the outset of the disease, it is clear that the insidious nature of Covid-19 required the deepening of continental and global collaboration. In particular, the ongoing and residual effects of Covid-19 will continue to be experienced

39 See T. Murithi, *The African Union. Pan-Africanism, Peacebuilding and Development*, London 2005.

40 See E. Ojomo/H. Y. Bappah, Health, in: U. Engel (ed.), *Yearbook on the African Union*. Vol. 1 (2020), Leiden/Boston 2021, pp. 108–126 (esp. 120–122). See also U. Engel/J. Herpolsheimer, African Regional and Inter-Regional Health Governance: Early Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic by ECOWAS and the African Union, in: *African Security* 14 (2021) 4, pp. 318–340.

for the next 5 to 10 years, and this is only on the assumption that a vaccine and a cure can be developed during this intervening period.

The African Union, through its African Centre for Diseases and Control (CDC) and the Africa Task Force for Coronavirus (AFTCOR), developed a strategy to guide a continental response, known as the Joint Africa Continental Strategy on Covid-19.⁴¹ On 26 March 2020, the strategy was endorsed by health ministers of AU member states and subsequently approved by the Bureau of the African Union Heads of States and Government, which was led by the president of South Africa, in its capacity as the Chairperson of the AU Assembly for 2020. The Bureau also included the presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Mali, and Kenya. As national health budgets in Africa are limited and constrained in terms of facilities and health workers, the continent is particularly vulnerable to containment and prevention of the spread of the virus.

On 26 March 2020, the Union's Commission also established an AU Covid-19 Response Fund, with the intention of strengthening the ability to coordinate a continental response to Covid-19.⁴² In addition, the Fund has the objective of addressing socio-economic and humanitarian consequences of the virus on African populations. These initial initiatives by the African Union to respond to Covid-19 are encouraging and reveal the desire to forge solidarity among the 55 members of the continental body. However, there is an urgent need to scale up the level of intervention to mitigate against the lasting legacy of the virus in the next decade, and beyond, as well as confront the underlying issues that continue to undermine the well-being and livelihoods of African citizens across the continent. Specifically, it is useful to interrogate how the AU can utilize the Covid-19 pandemic as a catalyst for deepening Pan-Africanism and promoting and consolidating solidarity in the post-Corona continental landscape. Concretely, Africa needs to continue to embrace Pan-Africanism in order to address the damaging effects of Covid-19 on governance, socio-economic well-being, gender equality, public health, education, and industry.

The adoption of an AU Covid-19 Strategy is an indication that this impulse towards deepening Pan-Africanism is a living project and a work-in-progress. However, the African Union's Covid-19 Strategy, needs to be reformulated to move beyond its narrow focus on the public health and focus on the lasting legacy of the virus and pandemic, with an emphasis on how the continent, can pursue sustainable peace, regional integration, governance, and socio-economic well-being as pathways towards a more prosperous Africa in the post-Corona world.

Covid-19 has now brought into stark reality the fact that there is much more that unites us as human beings, than that which divides us through artificial colonial borders and false narratives about the "other". The post-Covid-19 world will be a terrain in which it

41 African Union, *Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak*, Addis Ababa: African Union and Africa CDC.

42 See the follow-up on the operationalization of the fund by the AU Executive Council, Decision Adopted Online Through a Silence Procedure, video conference, 13 April 2021.

will be difficult to put this genie, of-our-common-humanity, back into the state-centric bottle. This does not mean that Africa's artificial national borders will miraculously disappear in the post-Covid-19 world, in fact they will demonstrate a persistent resilience in the minds of many of the continent's citizens. The difference will be that the fact that Covid-19 have already demonstrated that we are continentally and globally interconnected through worldwide networks of communication and transportation. The indiscriminate nature of Covid-19 will paradoxically have also triggered the embryonic idea that we are in fact one Pan-African society, because no country on its own was able to prevent the disease from penetrating the false borders. The disruptive effects of Covid-19 can only be address through the collective will and action of a unified Pan-African and global society.

The persistence of the state-system on the African continent is a legacy of the colonial empires which introduced their self-demarcated and externally imposed administrative borders for the purposes of the exploitation and extraction of natural resources to develop their own industries. This phenomenon of colonial continuity is a hindrance, but not an insurmountable obstacle, to forging a Pan-African consciousness and identity. The AU has only had a limited degree of success in forging a Pan-African consciousness and identity, both within the continent and among the diaspora around the world. The effective activation of a Pan-African consciousness and identity is a necessary precursor towards consolidating the gains of the first 20 years of the AU's efforts to advance and pursue African unity and solidarity.

9. Citizen Participation in the Transformation of the African Union

Africa can move beyond the fraught relationship between citizens and its states, in order to forge an optimal continental force that proactively influences and shapes the global agenda. Citizenship relates to the rights and obligations that individuals are entitled to in a defined political community.⁴³ The imposition of the nation-state in Africa has also rendered citizenship a source of division, exclusion, and exploitation. The progressive trend towards a deepening continental integration can contribute towards the towards the de-territorialization of citizenship, as cross-border processes of political and socio-economic exchange reduce the saliency of traditional exclusivist state-centric political configurations. It is therefore necessary to inculcate a notion of continental citizenship, based on the principles of Pan-Africanism. Specifically, the fissures created by the state can be transcended by forging a regional, or Pan-African citizenship. This should be encouraged because, types of citizenship proliferate continuously, that it is possible to identify dual citizenship and transnational citizenship, corporate citizenship, and global

43 See R. Bereketab, *Reconceptualizing Identity, Citizenship and Regional Integration in the Greater Horn Region*, in: K. Megisteab/R. Bereketab (eds.), *Regional Integration, Identity and Citizenship in the Greater Horn of Africa*, Suffolk 2012, pp. 25–50.

citizenship. If it is effectively managed the overlap of identities between Africa's neighbouring countries, can become a focal point for forging a unified prosperous and integrated continent, in line with Agenda 2063, rather than reinforcing the institutions and structures that fuel exclusion and division. Citizen mobilization, engagement, and participation can contribute towards mitigating against the democratic reversals that are currently threatening to undermine the progressive gains which the continent has achieved in terms of consolidating the rule of law and the pursuit of human rights and gender equality.

The requirement to consolidate continental responsibility also invokes the need for active Pan-African citizenship in confronting self-defeating practices where they persist, and for holding Africa's so-called leaders to account through the self-ascribed promotion of "Civic Pan-Africanism" as a vehicle to mobilize continent-wide leadership across the continent, which will build solidarity networks with other societal actors from around the world.

10. The African Union and the Remaking of the Global Order

The Agenda 2063 provisions can motivate the African continent to assert itself and become a dynamic force in influencing, shaping, and remaking the global order. To a large extent, efforts to ensure sustainable peace, security, governance, and development in Africa have always been undermined by the dominant international and geo-political agendas of the day. After colonialism, it was the Cold War; and in the post-Cold War world the pressures of the various processes of globalization are impacting on Africa's peace and development efforts. However, the continent's ability and capacity to promote peace have also been undermined by Africa's leaders and their failure to find ways to address their differences and hold one another accountable. Africa's leadership deficit leaves the continent extremely vulnerable to internal fissures and external penetration and exploitation. For example, the fuel that adds to the flame of conflict in Africa is the role that globalization plays in perpetuating and sustaining wars. This reality has been made possible or easier by the emerging global networks of trade and instant financial transactions that allow the ability to shift huge amounts of capital at the click of a button to offshore accounts beyond the investigative reach of unsuspecting citizens and civil society organizations, as has now been revealed by the infamous Panama Papers.⁴⁴

Historically, the continental ability and capacity to advance its interests has also been undermined by the lack of political will among African leaders to find ways to address their differences, collectively solve their problems, and to act in unison. However, increasingly the African continent is emerging as a vocal, and in some respects an influential actor in international relations and in addressing global challenges and is actively advancing the

44 See International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/> (accessed 28 February 2023).

agenda to remake the global order, specifically as it relates to the transformation of the UN Security Council and other global institutions. Specifically, it is only in the second decade of the twenty-first century that we can begin to witness Africa's place in the international system as one of emerging from relative obscurity and marginalization to an incremental status towards increasing prominence. The emerging political prominence of the African continent on the world stage is predicated on an evolving internal process of contested reform which is a pre-requisite to the consolidation of continental integration. Also, the continent has undergone a significant trajectory in terms of its own Pan-African relations as well as in its international relations, and is now emerging as a source, rather than a target, of analysis.

As the AU proceeds into its third decade of existence, and as the liberal international order, developed and promoted by the United States of America and its client states, undergoes a period of profound existential crisis and fragmentation, which has further been accelerated by the Covid-19 global pandemic, there is a significant window of opportunity for the African continent to assume the responsibilities of its self-determination and self-actualization. In particular, Africa in the post-Corona world should be focused on proactively redefining its governance and economic models to ensure that it creates functional polities across the continent and contributing to these efforts on the global stage, which will respond to the basic needs of their people in terms of peace, security, accountability, and improved livelihood.⁴⁵

The African Union and its regional economic communities need to take advantage of the global reset created by the Covid-19 pandemic to genuinely move beyond the rhetoric of harmonizing their collective efforts and mobilize collective action in order to achieving genuine practical coordination and efficacy in influencing, shaping, and driving global agendas. African leaders and civic actors need to proactively motivate for the rethinking of the foundation of current global governance institutions, if the world is to enable itself to address the climate catastrophe, refugee crisis, and the illicit trade in natural resources. In particular, the AU has through the Ezulwini Consensus of 2005 advocated for a fundamental restructuring of the UN Security Council, an appeal that has fallen on deaf years in the intervening period.⁴⁶ The issue of UN reform came into the fore in 2022, as a by-product of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and it is now incumbent upon governmental and societal actors across all continents to pick-up the mantel and revive this agenda going forward. Concretely, African Union governments can invoke Article 109 of the UN Charter, which calls for a General Conference of the members of the United Nations to reflect and review the Charter, through a process that cannot be vetoed by the Permanent Five Members of the UNSC.⁴⁷ The AU which has a substantial interest

45 In this respect, see the paper by the AU Commissioner Political Affairs, Peace and Security, B. Adeoye, *Common African Positions on Global Issues. Achievements and Realities* (= Africa Report 30), Pretoria, 2020.

46 AU Executive Council, *The Common African Position on the Proposed Reform of the United Nations: "The Ezulwini Consensus"*. Adopted by the 7th Extraordinary Session of the AU Executive Council held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 7–8 March 2005. Ext/EX.CL/2 (VII).

47 United Nations, *United Nations Charter*, New York: United Nations, chapter XVIII, para. 109.

in advancing this agenda will need to build a coalition of the willing among Asian, Latin American, and European countries to frame and drive such an initiative targeted at re-making the global order.

11. Conclusion

This contribution has assessed the changes, contestations, and consolidation of efforts by the AU to transform the African continent over the last 20 years. It has assessed the AU's internal reforms and its efforts to restructure its approach to peace, security, governance, and transitional justice. In addition, the efforts to mitigate against the effects of Covid-19 virus were discussed and its lingering effects on Pan-African society addressed. Projecting forward in terms of the next two decades of the AU, gradual implementation of Agenda 2063 requires a more pronounced synergy between the processes of societal transformation through the effective implementation of peace, security, governance, and trade policies that leverage the African Continental Free Trade Area. A lesson emerging from the AU's 20 years of operations, is that the peace, security, governance, and transformation of any individual country on the continent can only be achieved by ensuring the security and governance of all, and every African is every other African's keeper, which reaffirms the notion of Pan-African solidarity. Without a genuine commitment across the entire AU system to facilitate and enable this synergy, the pursuit of the Pan-African vision of a peaceful and prosperous continent, as stipulated in Agenda 2063, will remain an elusive aspiration.

It was argued that despite the growing acknowledgment of the regional nature of conflicts in Africa, there is still a significant uptake of the AU Transitional Justice Policy and the promotion of regional reconciliation. Therefore, during its first 20 years of operation, the AU's interventions relating to transitional justice have only had a limited impact in terms of efforts to address the broad dimensions of regionalized conflict systems. The contribution assessed the case for implementing the AUTJP through national ownership of transitional justice processes, as well as identifying the role of RECs in leading and driving regional reconciliation through the enumeration of the practicalities and modalities of implementing cross-border redress and accountability processes. The self-sabotaging reluctance of nation-states to devolve their sovereignty adopt processes that might be seemingly outside of their sphere of authority and control through the establishment of cross-border institutions, will be the primary obstacle to implementing regional reconciliation, and it further delays continental integration.

The article also assessed how in the absence of a genuine belief in the intentions of neighbouring countries then it becomes difficult to achieve regional integration. This is currently the situation that bedevils Africa's sub-regions and undermines the continent's unity of purpose and the progressive fulfilment of Agenda 2063. Regional integration requires a high degree of coordination and harmonization of policy agendas, and the focused involvement of Africa's leaders and government cooperation as well as proactive

citizen participation. The adoption of the African Continental Free Trade Area and the prospective implementation of the African Union Protocol on the Free Movement of People are important vehicles that can guide the continent on its journey towards the Agenda 2063 destination. Specifically, these policy frameworks generate new opportunities for increasing entrepreneurship, trade, and cross-border cultural exchanges which will create new wealth for the continent as well as foster the spirit of Pan-Africanism in the next phase of the AU's operations.

As the African Union continues on its journey towards the next 20 years, it is evident that Pan-African consciousness will not emerge through wishful thinking, and it will still need to be proactively fostered through introspective work and through processes which support African people to unlearn their propensity towards designating fellow human beings as the "other". Concretely, the work of building a Pan-African society and fulfilling Agenda 2063 needs to be further enhanced through open discussions in family settings, in schools, at places of work, worship, and trade. Specifically, a degree of persistence will be required to continue to advocate for the Pan-African inter-connectedness of the peoples of the continent, because over centuries of confining the peoples of the continent within Westphalian nation-states has rendered the fictional nation-state units "real" in the minds of Africa's citizens. There are pockets of resistance to this statist straight-jacket, as citizens across the continent are already leading the charge of embracing their Pan-African identity, in this regard, the centrality of citizen participation in the shaping and framing of Africa's future cannot be understated. African citizens are the essential and most important actors in the continent's state and regional structures, and it is crucial to prioritise their active engagement and participation in the further deepening of a revitalized Pan-Africanism, which in turn will serve as the key driver for the transformation of the African continent over the next 20 years.