The European Union (EU) and African Union (AU) have repeatedly placed peace and security high within their shared priorities, while also acknowledging new and emerging concerns such as climate change and sustainable development. In the decades since the partnership first emerged, however, it has not always succeeded at delivering on its commitments, in part due to inadequacies in the responses to crises and conflicts that reflect old power dynamics between the EU and AU and their Member States, between authorities and local communities, and between power-holding and marginalised groups within communities.

As the EU and AU seek to redefine their partnership in view of new and enduring challenges, there is a genuine opportunity to move beyond colonial legacies, outdated understandings of state-centric security and donor-recipient dynamics to build an inclusive, people-centred approach that delivers on its peace and security goals for communities across both continents.

HARD SECURITY OR HARDLY SECURE?

EU-Africa partnerships for security have largely focused on “hard” security approaches, including through strengthening state security or prioritising counterrorism objectives, often with disregard for the perceptions and experiences of security of the diverse men, women, boys and girls, including minorities, who are most affected by conflict. While such approaches have sometimes delivered on limited, short-term, tactical security objectives, they have often failed to put human security at the core of the approach, and have not yielded long-term results of peace and stability. Too often, such approaches have served to exacerbate grievances and worsen conflict dynamics.

**Recommendation:** The EU, the AU, and their Member States should put human security and the safety of Africans and Europeans at the heart of their approach to peace and stability - including climate and inequality-induced risks - by prioritising locally-led analysis and action, conflict-sensitive approaches, and inclusivity and accountability of their security approaches.

Limited engagement with and consideration of local communities’ needs and concerns has also contributed to increasing mistrust of security actors, government authorities, and regional and international security partners, limiting the possibilities of creating self-sustaining progress on peace, security, and governance in conflict settings. The COVID-19 pandemic has in many ways exacerbated these issues.

**Recommendation:** The AU, the EU, and their Member States should champion a fundamental reframing of the security sector governance and practice that centre security actors’ responsibility to provide shared security and protection services to, and in partnership with, civilian rights-holders, addressing localised needs and concerns as part of efforts to rebuild trust in institutions and authorities.
CLIMATE AND CONFLICT: INTERTWINED CRISSES

As the effects of climate change become increasingly evident, so too do the links between climate and violence. Further complicating disputes over land resources in the Sudano-Sahel region, questions about the accountability of both private and public sector actors seeking to meet growing demand for “green” minerals sourced in fragile contexts, or increasing inter-group competition over access to water in the Ruzizi Plain region are just some of the ways the climate crisis intersects with conflict. In the coming years, these effects will likely grow more pronounced, and there is a need to create the architecture to manage climate induced friction in a non-violent way. Climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts offer a concrete opportunity to work across dividing lines to address a common challenge.

**Recommendation:** The EU, the AU and their Member States should mainstream and systematise a conflict sensitive approach to climate change adaptation and reversal initiatives to ensure a sound understanding of how these initiatives might interact with peace and conflict dynamics and how negative consequences can be mitigated. They should also use climate adaptation efforts as an opportunity to work across dividing lines and foster cooperation.

Furthermore, high level commitments on climate change have not always equally considered European and African perspectives or local expertise on conflict and resource management. In the worst cases, this has led to accusations of “green” colonialism; in others, avoidable pitfalls or unforeseen consequences hampered the impact of climate-related initiatives. Women, youth, and marginalised groups are particularly vulnerable to climate change and conflict and its consequences. They are also often uniquely placed to address climate-related challenges and conflicts.

**Recommendation:** Local experiences and knowledge on tackling climate-related conflicts (e.g. traditional stewardship and mediation practices) - including women- and youth-led efforts - should be at the centre of the EU, the AU and their Member States’ policies on conflict and resource management.

NO PEACE WITHOUT PEOPLE

Not all efforts to improve peace and security have been inclusive of diverse backgrounds and perspectives; failure to meaningfully engage with traditionally underestimated or excluded actors - such as women, youth, religious actors and other marginalised groups - have resulted in incomplete analyses and decision-making, with key challenges and opportunities not identified or prioritised.

Conventional perceptions of women, youth, and other marginalised groups as primarily victims - as well as the binary victim-perpetrator narrative surrounding religious actors - are slowly shifting to recognise their knowledge and expertise as active participants in peace and stability efforts. Considering humanity's gender diversity and the African continent’s median age of 19.7 years¹, as well as the important role religion plays in most Africans' daily lives², religious engagement initiatives like the AU Interfaith Dialogue Forum and implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security agendas are crucial for truly inclusive peace and security efforts. Without systematic and sustained engagement, however, there is a risk that inclusion of such groups in peace and security remains purely declaratory or tokenistic, without meaningful follow up.

**Recommendation:** The AU, the EU and their Member States should make a clear commitment to engaging diverse demographics in the renewed African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), supported by concrete actions and timelines to effect meaningful change - either in addition to or in line with existing initiatives. Inclusion of women, youth, religious actors, and other traditionally undervalued or marginalised groups should account for both their specific vulnerabilities and capacities as agents of change.

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¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019
² World Values Survey, [https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp](https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp)