

“CONTINENTAL COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS TO ENSURE DEVELOPMENT, PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA”

Re-energising the effort towards a new continent through accountable leadership.

ABSTRACT

Leadership fit for purpose is key in building a continent that can resolve its political, social and economic challenges requires collaboration to achieve development, peace and security.

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1. Introduction

The African continent's journey from colonialism to total freedom continues to be a subject of several theoretical formulations. Frankema *et al* (2023) characterise the continent's history as one of complexity. In what the 2023 United Nations' Special Advisor on Africa refers to as development paradox, the continent is shown to be endowed with natural resources, but its story continues to be one of poor development, political instability and conflict. Over the years, a multiplicity factors have combined to frustrate the process of freeing the continent from the vestiges of its colonial past. Focusing on political stability, development, economic well-being, and human development progress, this paper crystalises the role played by the political leadership in either advancing or inhibiting the pace of these. To facilitate the examination of the continent's progress in these areas, the paper uses two epochs, the fight for political freedom from the colonisers as well as the post-colonisation struggle to achieve political stability and self-sufficiency.

1.1. Objectives of the paper

To contribute to strategies and practices put in place to advance the achievement of a peaceful and prosperous continent, this study will:

- examine the tools to advance stability, peace and economic conditions in the continent,
- crystalise inherent shortcomings and challenges with the current architecture, and,
- provide possible changes and institutionalisation of proposed interventions.

The above themes will help profile leadership's role in facilitating or inhibiting effectiveness use of current and future policies tools and strategies. It is political leadership that dominates in any assessment of global progress. In fact, Chidozie *et al* (2020) make bold and assert that "… the disparity, discrepancy, unevenness and inequality … the asymmetrical nature of the global distribution of wealth, is a serious indictment on global political failure of political leadership".

2. Methods and limitations

This study will answer questions of **how** and **why** certain developments have unfolded in the continent. Tenny *et al* (2022) asserts that research on these questions is qualitative in nature and defines qualitative research as allowing participants to explain how, why, or what they were thinking at specific times. Its strength is its ability to explain processes and patterns of phenomena such as experiences, attitudes, and behaviours. Data collection with be through techniques including **interviews**, **documents analysis** and **observation**. As reflected below, no interviews were conducted for this specific exercise.

The research work undertaken in putting together this paper did not benefit from direct interviews with key role-players and relied heavily on documented sources of information. Also, access to scholarly articles was limited due to affiliation requirements and the internet became the main source of information. Sadly, the AU's site is not as up to date as it could be and links to reports return error messages and no longer exist. As such, the depth of information is not sufficient which limits the extent of the analysis.

3. Thems of the discussion

Ndulu (2007), in a World Bank report, places political choices among the key variables in explaining the economic misfortunes of the continent during the 1970s. Central to political choices is leadership exercise by the elected executive which according to the Kofi Anan Foundation (2023) can be the missing link between challenges and available solutions.[1] The Foundation asserts that political leadership "significantly influences the security, well-being, and prosperity of societies and citizens' confidence in governments.

3.1. Peace and security architecture of the AU

Of the two hundred and forty-five coups in world tween 1950 and 2025, the continent contributed one hundred and nine, a staggering forty four percent. The birth of the African Union, in 2002, sought to usher in a dispensation of peaceful, stable and developing continent. To institutionalise peace and security, the AU established the Peace and Security Council whose membership is spread across five regions of the continent. It is telling that, twelve years after its establishment, the PSC still had some of its critical sub-structures not fully functional. Also, its reliance on partnership with regional economic communities has not borne notable success in promoting peace and security. The continent continues to experience strife with seven coups having taken place from 2020. The East African Community has not resolved the conflict in the Eastern DRC, coup leaders in the Sahel region have simply ignored ECOWAS attempts to rein them in.

3.1.1. Silencing the guns: an antecedent to development and stability

In line with the AU's Agenda 2063, in 2013 the AU heads of state adopted a declaration to end all conflict and wars by 2020. Five years on, the DRC and Sudan are experiencing war while Mozambique and Nigeria are under siege by extremists and as noted earlier, between 2020 and 2025, the continent has experienced seven coups. Also important is the 2025 elections in Tanzania which took place under extreme repression. Contrasting this with the peaceful transition in Botswana highlights the role of leadership in shaping developments.

[1] https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/news/the-future-of-political-leadership/

3.1.1.1. The Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa

The committee supports the AU's long-term goals of achieving peace and security through coordination of efforts to combat terrorism and extremism in the continent. As recently as August 2025, a conference of this important organ could not have all its members attend a meeting in Libya. Despite public emphasis that "the body plays a pivotal role in supplying intelligence assessments to the African Union, enabling timely decision-making", the continent continues to see Mozambique and Nigeria continue to be plagued by attacks by extremists.

3.1.1.2. Peace and Security Council (PSC)

The PSC, according to the African Union documents, exists to "decision-making organ of the AU for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts" which aligns with one of the organisation's flagship commitments in line with its **Agenda 2063**. Silencing the guns reflects the AU's commitment to end all wars in the continent and create stable governance and development. Among others, the PSC's powers include:

- instituting sanctions whenever an unconstitutional change of government takes place in a Member State,
- undertaking peace-making and peacebuilding functions to resolve conflicts
- authorising the mounting and deployment of peace support missions, and lay down general guidelines for the conduct of such missions including the mandate, and,
- anticipating and prevent disputes and conflicts, as well as policies, which may lead to genocide and crimes against humanity.

The work of the PSC is facilitated through departments like the Political Affairs, Peace and Security. The AU site shares very little on the performance of this department apart from its Peace Fund and that it is headed by a diplomat from Nigeria. In addition to PAPS, there is the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) which serves to "anticipate and prevent conflicts on the continent, and to provide timely information about evolving violent conflicts, based on specifically developed indicators".

4. Reflecting on the actual performance

The preceding sections of this paper have served only to remind us of what is already in place. Any reflections on actual achievements were a necessity for the abstract and do not elaborate the review of actual performance. The following sections reflect what has been up to now. This section 'compares' the continent using the periods from 1957 to 1994 and from 1994 to date.

The comparison focuses on the extent to which the continent has progressed in both economic development as well as peace and stability by comparing how the picture looked before the birth of the AU and the period thereafter. How the picture looks from when the AU was established serves as the foundation for what I propose to argue regarding the execution of leadership over the organisation's drive to implement programmes related to its ideals.

4.1. Peace, political stability, conflict

The period between 1957 up to and including the 1990s was one of intense conflict in the continent with intra-country and inter-country wars. The intra-country conflicts arose soon after countries gained their independence from colonisers driven by ethnicity, scramble for access to economic resources and corruption. The Biafran War of Nigeria between 1967 and 1970 where the eastern part of the country wanted to secede. Between 1961 and 1989 Angola was gripped in a civil war with the apartheid South Africa backing Jonas Savimbi's UNITA in a fight against the MPLA. In Mozambique, between 1977 and 1992, the country was gripped in a war between the FRELIMO government forces and the RENAMO rebels. Until 1991, South Africa's struggle for national liberation continued to have military action as one of its pillars. The war of independence raged in Rhodesia until 1979 when Zimbabwe became a free country. Similarly, in Namibia' SWAPO was engaged in a war for independence against the apartheid South African government until 1989.

During this period, the continent experienced several coups with Ghana (1966, 1972, 1979 and 1981), Nigeria (1966, 1974, 1983, 1985, and 1993), featuring in the long list of affected countries. Niger, Sudan, Ethiopia, Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone adding also experienced coups at one point of the period under review. The Powell and Thyne Centre of the University of Illinois reports that the continent had over eighty successful coups between the mid-1950s and 1999. That is an average of two coups per year. From 2001 to 2023, the period I term as the AU era recorded twenty-five coups, an average of a coup every ten months. In other words, the AU era has matched the OAU picture in half the time it took the OAU era as far as conflict and coups. There are recent outbreaks of internal conflict in Sudan, South Sudan, Mozambique, Tanzania, DRC, and the Sahel region.

4.2. Continental economic growth

Data from the World Bank shows Sub-Sahara's highest GDP growth being at nine percent in 1969. A year before the AU was established, the continental GDP growth stood at 4.2% and the after its birth, the highest growth is 6% recorded in 2004 as well as 2012. The accompanying link, GDP growth (annual %) - Sub-Saharan Africa | Data, provides an interactive source to this information.

4.3. Human Development

Human development was originally defined as “a process of enlarging people's choices” that enables them “to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living” A report presented to the 5th African Population Conference in Tanzania in 2007 observed that “ World statistics show that African countries are in low level of HDI ranking, so that HDI for these countries in 2004 was 0.43 and the annual growth rate for 1975-2004 was 2.7%. In contrast in the other regions at high HDI ranking, HDI and annual growth rate were 0.89 and % 1.1, respectively”.[2]

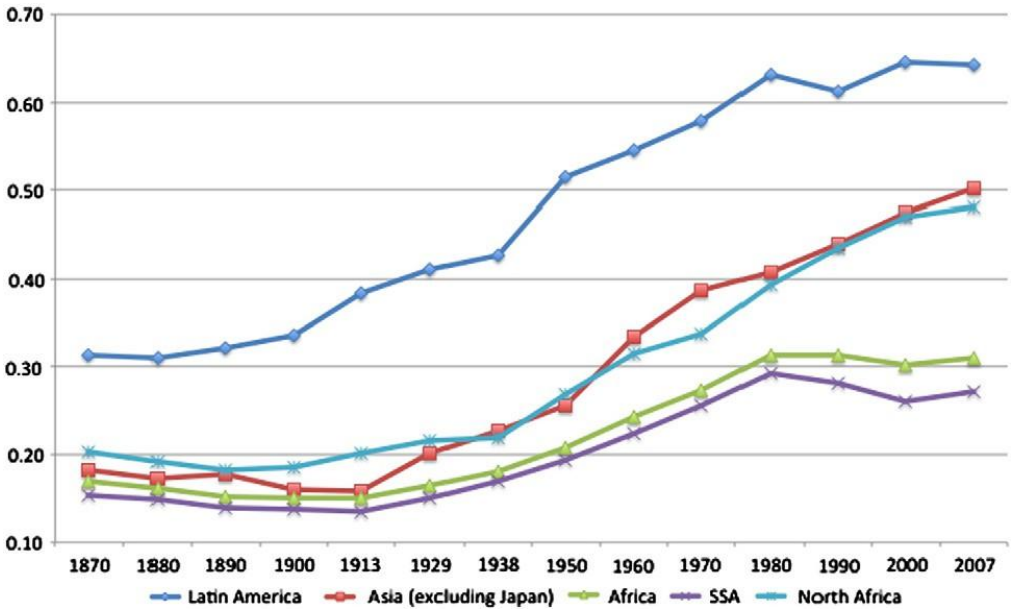


Fig.1 HIHD across developing regions: Explorations in Economic History (2013)

4.4. Summarising the continent

The AU’s Agenda 2063 enjoined the continent, among other calls, to achieve the ideal of silencing the guns in line with goal 14 of “a peaceful and secure Africa”. The source of this noble call can be traced to the conflict-ridden history of the continent between the 1950s and the early 2000s when the AU was established. The Union’s own records show that while the target date was initially 2020, it was extended by a decade to 2030. In 2026, the continent is a mere four years away from the target date. The Great Lakes continues to be in the grips of conflict that affects Rwanda, the DRC, Uganda and Burundi. Recent outbreaks of elections related violence in Tanzania, Mozambique have laid bare the fragility of the continent’s relations with good governance.

[2] https://uaps2007.popconf.org/papers/70300

According to Koko (2013) in the Journal of African Elections, “since 1990 elections in the majority of African countries have thus taken place within the context of societies that are yet to internalise adequately the fundamental principles, values and rules of liberal democracy and of political leaders who are inclined to bend such values, principles and rules in order to ensure their continued presence at the helm of state institutions.” At the centre of this, according to Koko (2013), is that “elections are generally regarded as a zero-sum game in which loss amounts not only to political exclusion but to marginalisation from the socio-economic benefits expected to accrue to those in charge of the political system”.

The Sahel region has contributed the most to the coups of the 2020s with Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Guinea and Chad experiencing coups between 2020 and 2023. Attempts by the regional body, ECOWAS, to reign in these leaders were not only undermined but the coup leaders pulled their countries out of the body. What has happened instead is what some see as the rise in the popularity of some of the coup leaders among their citizens. In “Understanding election-related violence in Africa”, according to Koko (2013), of the fifty-four countries in the continent, only nine are categorised as “consolidating democratic states”, the rest are either completely autocratic or in a transition.

The practice of multiparty democracy in Africa since 1990

Consolidating democratic states	Progressing democratic states	States in advanced transition	States attempting transition	Persistent autocratic states
Benin; Botswana; Cape Verde; Ghana; Mauritius; Seychelles; South Africa; São Tomé y Príncipe	Kenya;[4] Lesotho; Mozambique; Namibia; Senegal; Tanzania; Zambia	Algeria; Angola; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cameroon; Comoros; Congo-Brazzaville; Côte d’Ivoire; Gabon; Liberia; Malawi; Morocco; Niger; Nigeria; Rwanda; Sierra Leone; Togo; Uganda	Central African Republic; Chad; Democratic Republic of Congo; Djibouti; Ethiopia; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Libya; Madagascar; Mali; Mauritania; Somalia (including Somaliland and Puntland); South Sudan; Sudan; Tunisia; Zimbabwe	Equatorial Guinea; Eritrea; Gambia; Swaziland

Source: Koko (2013)

As shown before, the continent last registered its highest GDP growth in 1969, five decades ago. In the years that the AU has been existence the growth rate has averaged below five percent. Between 2000 and 2012, according to the 2015 African Development Report published by the African Development Bank, the highest recorded annual growth was 3,9%. In 2025, the African Development Bank projected the average real GDP growth for 2026 to be 4.3 percent. The African Development Bank places a premium on economic growth because “Africa’s growth and entry into higher value-added areas of production and competitiveness will enable Africans to develop their potential, escape poverty, and support the continent’s trajectory toward inclusive growth and economic transformation”. The 2023 UNDP report showed the global HDI at 0.78, at the same period, the only African countries to beat that average were Seychelles and Mauritius at 0.83 and 0.79 respectively. The concept of the HDI provides a set of factors to measure to determine the well-being of a country’s people by tracking access to healthcare, education opportunities uptake, life expectancy, and other indicators. With the continent consistently coming in last compared to other continents, the continent’s citizens continue to be at a disadvantage regarding opportunities for a stable existence. Kpolovie *et al* (2017) released findings which showed “that Africa has HDI mean of 0.536 which is significantly lower than that for each of the other continents in the world”.

Africa’s ‘perpetual’ under-achieving in development has been a subject of scrutiny for a long time. The continent, according to Barke (2023), is a paradox of untapped potential and enduring challenges despite its abundant resources. Of the various factors attributed to this paradox, corruption, political instability, poor governance and conflict between and within nations are the most enduring. These factors, collectively, form what has become a major and negative influence deriving from the political–economic distortions that have afflicted the continent since independence, because of which, according to Barke (2023) despite these advantages, the continent remains “home to a significant portion of the world's poorest individuals”.

At the centre of the “distortions” referred to earlier is what Amundsen (2019) refers to as “extractive and power-serving political extraction”. This is when the political elite steal, embezzle public resources to enrich themselves and then use these to insulate themselves from accountability and to hold on to power. The ill-begotten wealth becomes a disincentive for political office bearers to vacate office fearing reprisal thus creating a self-perpetuating cycle to corruption, repression and strife. As extraction diverts public resources for own use, the economies suffer, citizens get plunged deeper into poverty leading to political office bearers adopting populist economic stances to placate the masses and extend their stay in power. The cycle becomes self-propelling leading to the picture of sustained paradox of “excessive want amidst the abundance of resources”.

5. The function of leadership in the (non)attainment of organisational goals

What this paper seeks to accentuate is the shortcomings in the exercise of leadership in the continent. An argument about the contribution of other objective factors like the unfavourable dominant world trade regime, the neo-colonialism posture of the bigger nations including former colonisers. The recent upsurge in the Sahel region where countries like Burkina Faso's leaders have 'revolted' against France, their former coloniser. Revelations of the impediments placed in the path of the country towards economic self-reliance are among such objective hurdles imposed on the continent. Tanko *et* al (2023) that "multifarious endogenous factors contributing to Africa' backwardness, blaming Western Europe is out of fashion". The plethora of objective facts exposing high levels of culpa on the part of African leaders due to corruption and misrule sustains the argument by Tanko *et al* (2023) that there is "the emergence of a paradigm shift to how Africans underdeveloped Africa". In this regard, this paper argues that it is the leadership that must carry this shame. Below I elaborate on the aspect of poor leadership as a contributor to the continent's inability to "silence the guns" and achieve a "peaceful and secure continent".

5.1. Theorising leadership

The analysis of the leadership's impact on their organisations' ability to achieve set goals has given rise to paradigms advancing the argument that a leader can be the sole determinant of the trajectory of the organisations they lead. On the opposite end of this analysis continuum is the argument that the exercise of leadership is a function of the organisation's environment. These two paradigms are referred to as the "strong man theory" and the other one where the leader's influence is limited by objective factors like culture and environment. It is not the intention of this paper to advocate for either of these especially considering that, over the years, leadership power, as a concept has so evolved as to defy attempts to limit its analysis to "either-or". In "From power to empowerment: A paradigm shift in leadership", Dambe and Moorad (2008) strengthen this point and assert that "leadership theory has been dominated by power and authority of the leader". It is therefore more on the sources of the leadership power across the continent that is the focus of the paper.

5.2. Sources of leadership power

According Dambe and Moorad (2008), the exercise of leadership is about deploying power either to compel or influence. Quoting Owens (2001, 236), they assert that leadership power is 'the capacity to influence others'. Using the quadrant charts below, I illustrate the proposition that sources of leadership power in the continent have impacted the continent's development negatively.

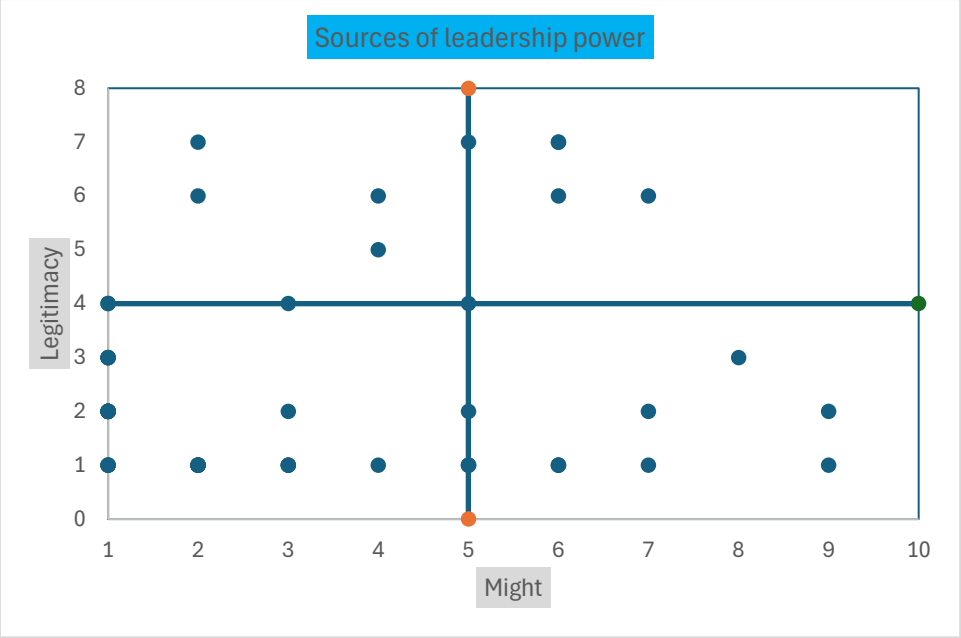


Chart 1: countries plotting 'countries' to demonstrate ideal placement for stability.

The above chart shows how countries fare depending on the strength of the sources of the power exercised by the political leadership. The top right represents the ideal positioning that countries should occupy where leadership power is a balance of might and legitimacy. On the opposite extreme will be countries occupying the bottom right where the leadership power is drawn more from might and less from legitimacy. Below the same chart is used to illustrate how specific countries have fared and the kind of leadership power involved.

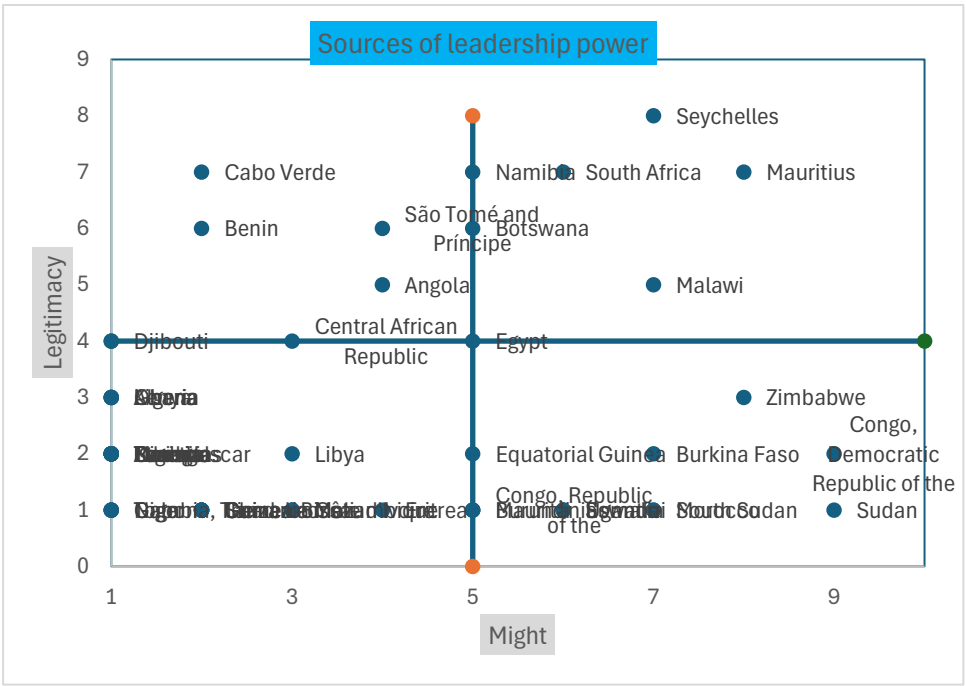


Chart 2: countries plotted in terms of data on conflict and HDI report.

Data from sources like the World Bank reports, scholarly sources, show the countries reflected in chart 2 aligning with the paper's hypothesis. The top right quadrant ranks high in the continent in terms of both the human development indices and political stability. The Seychelles and Mauritius are in the category of "very high" with countries like Botswana and South Africa falling in the category of "high". If one takes these examples, one sees a good measure of predictability in their political system as well as favourable reading of key development indicators.

5.2.1. Might and its source(s)

For purposes of this discussion, might is concerned more with coercive use of authority to achieve political goals. According to Damba and Moorad (2008) coercive power "uses force and fear by punishing followers for undesirable conduct". Capable of forcible domination, this leadership power, according to Damba and Moorad (2008) also uses 'reward' for conduct aligning with the leader's wishes. It is in contexts like this that political leaders deploy the use of military power to crush resistance. Tanzania, Mozambique are the most recent examples of use of force to silence dissent during elections. Economic leverage, in the form of patronage is also useful for leaders seeking to extend stay in political office.

5.2.2. Legitimacy and its source(s)

The Seychelles validates the paper's argument that if leadership is high on legitimacy, the country performs better. Seychelles is a functional multi-party democracy with functional institutions and healthy economy. The IMF projects a 3.3% GDP growth for 2026 and debt-to-GDP ratio of fifty six percent. In 2024 the country's unemployment stood at just above three percent in 2024. Reports by the IMF characterise Seychelles as a stable and mature system of governance. The Mo Ibrahim reports often place the country top in the corruption index.

5.3. Generally, about the above

If only fifteen out of the fifty-four countries in Africa can be categorised as practising sound democratic governments and only ten countries rank in the "high" category of the human development indices, the continent has not done well in meeting the goals set by the AU. A 2023 assessment of the AU's target on silencing the gun concluded that the Unions had failed to achieve the important task hence "the 14th Extra-Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly, held on December 6, 2020, in Johannesburg, South Africa, decided to extend the timeline by ten years to 2030". This report by the Addis Ababa based research organisation, Amani Africa, further states that the AU had resolved to improve in this regard and adopted the 'Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism for the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps for Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2030' in 2021.

Well, the 2023 Amani Africa report came two years after the 2021 adoption of the 'Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism" but still made damning findings about the AU's performance in this regard. In what the entity refers to as "extensive analysis" of the AU's STG, it surmised that:

> "the number of conflict situations on the agenda of the PSC increased by nearly threefold in the ten-year period from 2013 to 2023. This indicates both the spread of conflicts/crises and the rise in the number of such conflicts/crises within individual countries. Apart from the increase in the number of conflicts, Africa has also experienced, during the first ten years of the STG, an expansion in the geographic spread of conflicts. Additionally, the humanitarian consequences of the spike in the number and the expansion in the geographic spread of conflicts have also registered an alarming increase. For example, Amani Africa's report established that the number of internally displaced persons increased by three times between 2013 and 2023."

6. What to do

"Politicians' actions and decisions impact us all, yet the role of a political leader is often undefined and unsupported. Without attention, training and research, passionate, well-meaning political leaders may be set up to fail." This is the war cry that the Kofi Anan Foundation in advancing its "Leadership Excellence in Politics" intervention. Launched in 2024, this initiative aims to identify the cross-cutting leadership competencies and attributes needed to respond to emerging challenges, help more young people gain effective political power through political leadership training that equips them with critical policy- and decision-making skills, bring together experts to answer the big questions surrounding 21st-century political leadership, increase healthier, constructive dialogue about expectations between politicians and citizens, and help rebuild trust in political leadership[3]. What this initiative confirms is that political leadership in the continent requires an urgent overhaul. Critically, the overhaul must help re-imagine how individuals seeking political office must be found.

6.1. The maladies we must fix

The conclusion that the continent has not made the anticipated progress in achieving the goals of peace and stability as well as economic stability has been linked to leadership challenges. Ndulu (2007) identifies choices or decisions made by political leaders as a contributor to the continent's failure to realise what potential there may be and the Anan Foundation holds this accountable for "the gap between problems and solutions".

[3] https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/elections-democracy/leadership-excellence-in-politics-leip/#:~:text=Politicians'%20actions%20and%20decisions%20impact,be%20set%20up%20to%20fail.

It is on the back of leadership decisions that the continent has seen state security agencies being unleashed against citizen challenging unfair conduct of elections. The recent cases of Mozambique and Tanzania point to this. Botswana, on the other hand, has demonstrated that peaceful changes in political leadership are possible. Central to the leadership choices affecting the continent's progress is the impact of corruption among the ruling elite. Amundsen (2019) captures this problem by asserting that political powerholders enrich themselves by abusing their hold on power to extract from public and private resources. He argues that bribery, embezzlement, and fraud for the benefit of individual powerholders and for the regime as such all contribute to this problem. Political powerholders proceed to use the corruptly acquired means, in illicit or immoral ways, to maintain and strengthen their hold on power.

Through this, Amundsen (2019) argues, corruption is used to build political support and secure protection and impunity. It is on the back of this that some leaders refuse to leave office and use subversive means to frustrate democratic efforts to remove them. Between 2008-2023, twenty-two countries in the continent amended constitutions to extend the term of office of their leaders and in some cases, the term limits were removed completely. Eight of these countries used what the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies refer to as "extra-constitutional succession".[4] This causes the refusal to vacate office and leads to adopting populist policies to placate ordinary citizens.

6.2. Practical steps

6.2.1. In the short-term

Creative incentives must be activated to encourage political leaders to exit office peacefully. If, as the paper argues, fear for reprisal is among these, an amnesty model which does not eliminate accountability must be put in place. While facilitating avoidance of jail time, the model must provide for the return of ill-begotten assets for the benefit of the fiscus as well as redress for victims of persecution. A mix of the post-genocide Rwanda re-education and integration may be factored into the 'syllabus'. Secondly, political organisations must be engaged in a conversation to secure buy-in for a new model of identifying candidates for public office.

6.2.2. Mid to long-term

The engagements with political role-players on identification of candidates must be aimed at eventually giving society more say in this process. It must be 'taken away' from political parties because they have been shown to reward loyalty to the party more than expertise and knowledge. Accompanying this work must be a deliberate exercise of a multilateral drive to identify and prepare individuals for future roles in public office without the risk of populism.

[4] https://africacenter.org/spotlight/term-limit-evasions-coups-africa-same-coin/

The founding Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, is recorded as having made it his mission to ensure that his country's political leaders were a product of a structured identification and training process as opposed to merely securing the support of their political parties. Marvelling at the skills level demonstrated by the spacemen of Apollo 13 in 1970 during an emergency, is quoted as having enquired how the selection process showed the spacemen would not buckle under the severest test. A stringent process like how the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) selected the spacemen must be adopted to identify Singapore's future leaders.

Believing that he and his colleagues in the first Singapore government had been thrust into leadership by circumstances, Lee was determined to make sure that choosing leaders for the future "could not be left to chance, they would have to be sought out, groomed and tested".[5] Like Singapore did, the continent must develop "good men, with ability, integrity, commitment and that special quality which will make them keep their cool under fire".

6.2.3. Potential outcomes partners

Legacy foundations, institutions of higher learning and civil society must collaborate to drive a focused programme to develop these needed patriots. To the extent that they do not become obstructionist, political organisations will have a key role to play as well.

7. Conclusion

While observers continue to acknowledge that "historical realities like post-colonial problems continue to affect continental collective progress" poor leadership continues to be highlighted as impeding the achievement of progress (Njoku, 2024). The current peace and security architecture and supporting technical initiatives of the AU have one thing in common, they are centred around the incumbent leaders. The political leadership of the continent is presiding over initiatives to combat crisis they orchestrated or from which they stand to benefit. The entities put in place to silence the guns have the presence of leaders whose survival is buttressed by the guns. The current accountability loop must be disrupted.

[5] Lee Kuan Yew: The Man and His Ideas 2015

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