

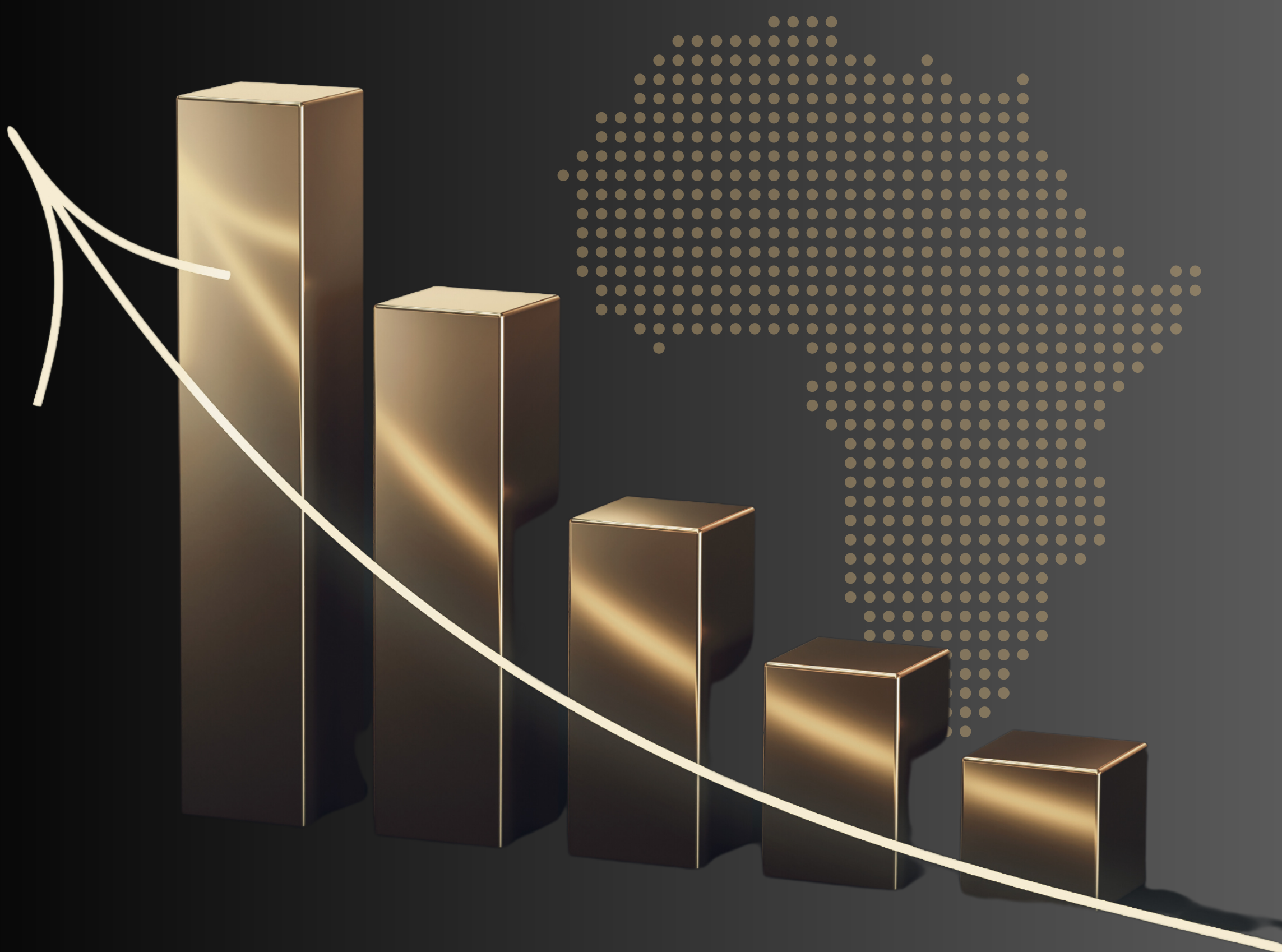
African Wars in the 21st Century

ECONOMIC AND SECURITY DETERMINANTS

FOR A STABLE CONTINENT

WORKSHOP REPORT

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WORKSHOP REPORT

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Dr. Ayandele is a member of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) Global Research Network and a member of the Effectiveness Peace Operations Network (EPON). She holds a Ph.D. in Global Affairs from Rutgers – The State University of New Jersey, an M.P.A. in International Development Policy and Management, and a B.A. in Economics (Hons.), both from New York University. She tweets at @Jumo_Ayandele.

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Dr. Ilunga conducts policy-relevant research and studies on Africa's security, development, and governance issues. More specifically, he focuses on questions related to peace operations, civil-military interactions, natural resources-based conflicts, and regional cooperation in his writing and public engagement. He is the author of the book *Humanitarianism and Security: Trouble and Hope at the Heart of Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). He holds a Ph.D. in Global Affairs (Rutgers University, U.S.A).

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**CENTER FOR THE STUDY
OF AFRICA AND THE
AFRICAN DIASPORA**

Foreword

On behalf of the Center for the Study for Africa and the African Diaspora (CSAAD), and as CSAAD Director, it was our privilege, in conjunction with NYU's Africa House, NYU's School of Professional Studies, the Center for Global Affairs, the Initiative for the Study of Emerging Threats, the Joint Civil-Military Interaction Research and Education Network, and Salve Regina University to host the virtual expert workshop, African Wars in the 21st Century: Economic and Security Determinants for a Stable Continent, which convened on April 14, 2023. Under the leadership of Drs. Olajumoke (Jumo) Ayandele and Yvan Yenda Ilunga, the workshop brought together a number of scholars and experts to explore such topics as the role of regional integration and indigenous economic practices in strengthening transnational linkages; improving coordination between regional ad-hoc initiatives and international partners; and the regionalization of security responses by situating multinational private actors within a framework of social responsibility.

I now invite you to take full advantage of the superb workshop report carefully prepared by the conveners.

Michael A. Gomez

CSAAD Director

Silver Professor of History and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies

New York University

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A CONVENING ON AFRICAN WARS AND ITS MILITARIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: **ECONOMIC AND SECURITY DETERMINANTS FOR A STABLE CONTINENT.**

Introduction and Regional Observation

The proliferation of non-state armed groups in Africa over the past two decades has resulted in the regionalization of conflicts and an increase in cross-border informal and illicit economic activities within under-governed communities. This regionalization, particularly evident in areas such as the Sahel, Lake Chad, and Central Africa, has had diverse physical, social, and strategic implications, impacting various stakeholders including state forces, opposing groups, local communities, and domestic and international partners committed to a stable continent.

In response to the transnational nature of these armed groups, strategic ad-hoc regional initiatives have emerged to manage and stabilize conflict zones. Examples of these initiatives include the Regional Coalition Initiative against the Lord's Resistance Army, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) combating Boko Haram, and the G5 Sahel targeting local groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. These initiatives embody the collective security approach that underpins the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). However, their focus has primarily revolved around military-centric measures, overshadowing the potential of indigenous economic opportunities and partnerships to address the underlying vulnerabilities fueling conflicts in fragile areas.

While supporting ongoing ad-hoc regional efforts remains crucial for the physical security of these fragile regions, it is imperative to broaden the scope of regional responses beyond excessive reliance on security apparatuses when reimagining human security.

Specifically, the indigenous social and economic dimensions of insecurity must be recognized and addressed with the same level of mobilization and intensity devoted to military solutions.

A key aspect to consider in this endeavor is the labeling and categorization of indigenous economic activities. The ongoing debate surrounding the informal economy and its role in economic development necessitates a clear understanding of the concept of "informality." This is particularly important in the African context, where labeling certain economic practices as informal and separate from the established financial and economic system poses a significant obstacle to the long-term sustainability of African economies. Moreover, given that the majority of economic activities in Africa fall within this sector, equating the informal sector with illegal, hidden, or underground activities can inadvertently marginalize individuals and limit their agency in engaging in economic endeavors.

Neglecting to prioritize indigenous economic practices not only undermines the potential for sustainable development but also jeopardizes the prevailing community-based livelihood model deeply entrenched in local communities. This model shapes the dynamics of African economic organizations and transactions, emphasizing relational aspects rooted in personal relationships. By recognizing and valuing these relational aspects, regional responses can better align with the realities and aspirations of African citizens, promoting inclusive and resilient economic systems that incorporate human considerations rather than solely relying on static institutional structures that may overlook them. Such community-based responses may help to improve and support local security dynamics through economic mechanisms.

To further explore local and regional economic and security determinants for a more stable and prosperous Africa, a virtual workshop was convened on April 14, 2023. The workshop, organized by the Center for the Study of Africa and the African Diaspora (CSAAD) in collaboration with the Center for Global Affairs, the Initiative for the Study of Emerging Threats, NYU Africa House, the Joint Civil-Military Interaction (JCMI) Research and Education Network, and Salve Regina University, gathered over twenty African scholars and security experts from around the world.

This report aims to provide a forward-looking perspective by discussing the presentations from each workshop session, identifying current and emerging trends, as well as opportunities for local, state, and regional actors to collaborate and be accountable in reimagining regional security and economic development.

We believe that the insights presented in this report will contribute to important scholarship on innovative interdisciplinary frameworks that prioritize a human rights-based approach in shaping economic and security responses.

Opening Discussion

The workshop commenced with an opening address and introduction by Dr. Michael A. Gomez, Director of the Center for the Study of Africa and the African Diaspora, who emphasized the academic significance of the workshop and its thematic focus. Following Dr. Gomez's remarks, Dr. Olajumoke (Jumo) Ayandele provided additional insights. Dr. Ayandele offered a concise background of the project and delivered an overview of the key issues relating to the local and regional economic and security determinants for a more stable and prosperous Africa. During this initial conversation and discussion, several observations were made:

- In many African countries, discussions surrounding economic development and investments tend to be predominantly centered around the formal economic sector. This is evident in how private sector investors and international financial institutions assess a state's economic prospects, relying on measures like Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to track economic growth.
- However, it is important to recognize the growing informal sector on the African continent, which constitutes the majority of economic activities and employs 85 percent of the African workforce. This sector is unique in its multidimensional and multi-sectoral nature, providing a realistic opportunity for millions of Africans to participate in economic activities.
- Conversely, cross-border informal economic practices at the regional level pose a threat to both state and regional stability. These practices create opportunities for transnational organized crimes and activities. Conflict zones such as the Sahel and Central Africa regions have witnessed armed groups and criminal networks exploiting the informal economy and porous borders to advance their illegal operations and generate funds.
- In response to the failure of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to effectively implement regional policies and harmonize politics, ad-hoc initiatives have emerged. These initiatives aim to address the shortcomings of RECs in addressing security and governance issues within member states. Furthermore, these ad-hoc initiatives tend to attract more funding, possibly due to donor fatigue with existing regional frameworks, raising concerns about the legitimacy and institutional capacity of African regional organizations.

- The increasing involvement of military contractors and mercenaries, such as the Wagner Group, additionally raises questions about the level of responsibility African countries are willing to assume for their security. Unfortunately, these actors operate outside the established accountability mechanisms and contribute to a more complex security landscape for their host countries and regions, rather than providing effective solutions.

Workshop Sessions

Workshop sessions were organized around several themes that examined informal economies and their transnational characteristics, indigenous economic and security practices, ad-hoc security initiatives and their impacts on regional economic communities, as well as the increasing role of the private sector in the regionalization of conflict and security responses.

Session 1

Transnational Linkages: Regional Integration, indigenous economic practices, and informal networks as stabilization mechanisms

The first session commenced with a discussion on the practices of local economies and the strength of informal networks that have developed over centuries as essential pillars of local and regional stability. Throughout the session, participants engaged in debates surrounding the conceptual and practical challenges faced by academics and policymakers in defining and acknowledging the role of the informal sector within the broader regional economic activities of African states. While a consensus on the definition of the informal sector was not reached among participants, they unanimously agreed on the nature of informal activities, characterized as activities that go unrecorded by the state. Participants in conceptualizing the informal sector argued the following points:

1. The persistent use of the term **"informal"** tends to label actors within this category as individuals devoid of agency. However, it is crucial to recognize that informal workers have implemented formal means of documenting their activities through cooperative societies like the *Esusu*, *Mabati*, and *Upato*. Several participants also emphasized the importance of refraining from solely labeling these workers as "informal workers" and instead recognizing them as **non-state actors**, considering the significant role they play in local economies.

2. Individuals in the informal sector, predominantly young people, do not necessarily identify themselves as part of the informal sector, prompting the questions about what "informalization" truly signifies and its implications for reimagining Africa's economic practices and governance frameworks. While the informal sector encompasses enterprises that contribute to the well-being of families and local economies, **informality is often associated with survival strategies.** This is particularly evident in locations and contexts where the formal sector struggles to accommodate a substantial workforce or where political and economic structures are virtually nonexistent.
3. Challenges persist in mobilizing domestic resources from the informal sector. Despite individuals within the informal sector in countries like Nigeria being subjected to excessive taxation, informal workers are usually not captured in tax systems due to their undocumented status. For some participants, this lack of recording poses challenges, creating economic vulnerability, fostering corruption, and restricting the sector's growth potential.

The session also addressed the **transnational linkages between the informal sector and (in)security**, with discussions focused on protecting the informal sector from the exploitation of conflict dynamics while building regional peace and stability. Participants acknowledged that **borderland communities**, despite sharing common cultures and engaging in unconventional small-scale economic collaborations based on indigenous economic practices and traditional ties, are vulnerable to exploitation by conflict entrepreneurs within the informal sector. For instance, in the Democratic Republic of Congo the presence of an informal sector in border communities (mainly in communities with mineral resources), amplifies and facilitates conflict dynamics, which are manipulated by both state and non-state actors.

Despite the aforementioned conceptual and definitional challenges, participants emphasized the crucial role of informal economic activities in the long-term survival and sustainability of local communities. Taking into account the implications of the ratification of **the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA)** by most African states (46 as of February 23, 2023) on regional integration, participants reached the following conclusions:

- To address the negative aspects and capitalize on the opportunities of the informal economy, **it is essential to establish a common understanding and taxonomy of the informal sector.** This involves developing and defining parameters and metrics based on an economic model that considers **local contexts, systems, and agencies.** For states and policymakers, the crucial step is to understand how informal sector actors manage to survive despite adverse dynamics and conflicts. Such an approach is not only vital for long-term continental transformation but also for understanding the unique value and contribution of the informal sector to security and economic growth in Africa.
- **When it comes to regionalization, it is crucial to differentiate between informal workers and informal cross-border trade.** The former pertains to the status of the workers. The latter refers to the nature of transactions and trade flows that occur without being registered, going through official customs systems, or paying taxes. This distinction is important for rethinking state trade policies and developing complementary regional economic frameworks that align with local realities.
- Furthermore, the informal sector fulfills roles that the state should ideally perform in terms of social and economic relationships, such as facilitating mobility for a borderless Africa. Therefore, prioritizing and supporting informal structures and networks, understanding their organization, and leveraging indigenization may be able to strengthen cross-border trade. Additionally, while informal movement and trade can be exploited for organized crime, it can also be used by states for intelligence gathering, fostering cooperation between states and leading to positive cross-border interactions.
- African nations should leverage **innovative practices and new technologies,** such as online/mobile banking systems, to boost local economies and support community members who face challenges integrating into the formal economic system due to the rigidity of the banking system and economic structure. At the regional level, **improving access to finance and developing coordinated policies** to maximize cross-border informal economies would strengthen ties between countries and facilitate regional integration.

Session 2

Collaboration or Competition? Regional Ad-hoc Initiatives and the role of International Partners.

The session began by acknowledging the emergence of ad-hoc security initiatives in response to the failure of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to effectively address security and governance concerns within their respective regions. Recent instances of these failures were observed in West Africa, particularly in conflict zones such as the Lake Chad and Central Sahel, where ECOWAS has faced challenges in countering the activities of violent extremist groups and preventing recurring military coups despite implementing sanctions. As a result, affected member countries have resorted to implementing ad-hoc initiatives in collaboration with foreign partners as an alternative approach to strengthen their security and economic strategies. The session revolved around the following questions, which guided participants' contributions:

- 1.** How can state actors minimize competition around resource mobilization and political positioning, given the growing establishment of regional ad-hoc initiatives that seem to compete with traditional established regional economic frameworks?
- 2.** What is the most appropriate framework for ad-hoc initiatives to support and complement the work of regional organizations?
- 3.** Is it feasible for states to develop permanent legal and operational frameworks for ad-hoc initiatives that can exist in parallel with traditional regional economic arrangements? What are the opportunities and challenges involved?

In response to these questions, participants made several observations:

- There are high expectations for RECs to address governance and security issues. However, their organizational setup and mandates primarily focus on economic matters, which raises concerns about their effectiveness. The establishment of ad-hoc initiatives as an alternative framework is thus commendable, as they can respond quickly to the changing security needs of conflict zones through clear mandates. It was also noted that ad-hoc initiatives are typically established by countries that share political and security values, fostering harmonious relations. Such initiatives are critical for overcoming political tension and competition often observed between member states within RECs. However, **the absence of a binding organizational and legal framework continues to raise questions about the long-term operational accountability of ad-hoc initiatives.** To facilitate collaboration and complementarity between RECs and ad-hoc initiatives, participants suggested integrating ad-hoc initiatives into the long-term strategic and operational priorities of the RECs, linking them to regional institutions that respect their mandates.

- **Traditional strategic partners of RECs are increasingly shifting their support to ad-hoc initiatives.** This shift in support can be partly attributed to the perceived ineffectiveness of RECs. However, the proliferation of ad-hoc initiatives has the potential to further complicate the security landscape with additional operations and structures. A key challenge faced by ad-hoc initiatives is **the divergence of objectives.** African states prioritize territorial integrity, while foreign partners tend to focus on counterterrorism operations, as observed in Central Sahel. This divergence in priorities may pose difficulties in the long-term functioning of ad-hoc initiatives. To address this, it could be beneficial for RECs and their representatives to engage with member states and the affected population, utilizing local community leaders as conduits for education and awareness regarding the mandates of different stakeholders in addressing security threats. By managing expectations and fostering accountability, this approach can contribute to the overall effectiveness of African regional arrangements, ensuring that they align with the needs and priorities of the regions they aim to serve.

- Ad-hoc initiatives divert resources away from the critical security and economic challenges that RECs should prioritize. With numerous foreign partners and competing regional structures, the current strategies to address governance and security threats highlight **the challenge of responsibility among African leaders**. In order to effectively address evolving security threats and rebuild legitimacy, African leaders must be introspective and prioritize their efforts. Both ad-hoc initiatives and RECs should adopt a people-centered approach in their mandates, operations, and strategies to ensure Africa's stability. Ad-hoc initiatives present an opportunity for innovation; however, if they are to be maintained and complement existing REC frameworks, their mandates must incorporate aspects of **transitional justice, local participation, and agency**. This will ensure effective coordination of operations between the two bodies and address the critical security and economic challenges that require attention.

Session 3

Multinational Private Actors, Social Responsibility, and the Regionalization of Security Responses.

Session III focused on the increasing engagement of multinational private actors in regional security and economic development. While the participation of multinational corporations in African nations' political and economic spheres is not a new phenomenon, participants engaged in discussions about the evolving role of private actors. Specifically, they explored the direct influence of these actors in either supporting or destabilizing countries. It was observed that these multinational private actors have gained prominence in political activities on the continent, exerting influence over agendas pertaining to climate, energy, human rights, and other critical areas. Additionally, they actively contribute to governments' day-to-day security operations, as exemplified in Mali and the Central African Republic.

The discussions also expanded to encompass private military contractors and mercenaries associated with multinational companies. A consensus emerged among participants that many of these actors, including the Wagner Group, operate without being held accountable, thereby complicating the security landscape in their host countries and regions.

Key takeaways from the session include:

- The importance of addressing the level of responsibility African countries are willing to assume for their own security and development. To mitigate potential negative consequences, participants recommended imposing restrictions on the duration of mercenaries' deployment and implementing safeguards to prevent their **economic exploitation**.
- The involvement of legislative and judicial branches in ensuring **security accountability**. Although unconventional within traditional security frameworks, participants emphasized the necessity for parliamentarians to comprehend these dynamics and scrutinize security practices. Furthermore, exploring the role of **informal judicial actors** was deemed crucial in this context.

- The well-known issue of multinational corporations evading taxes, leading to significant financial losses of up to eighty billion dollars. The urgency to establish mechanisms curbing these financial loopholes was underscored, given their detrimental impact on the continent.
- The need to align interests and necessities in formulating countries' security and development strategies. Emphasis was placed on African leaders prioritizing the incentivization of regional partnerships over heavy reliance on external actors. In this regard, the implementation and promotion of **the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** play a pivotal role in driving regional integration. Thus, concerted efforts should be made to surmount trade barriers and foster an open and integrated trade environment. This transition will foster enhanced economic development and minimize security disruptions caused by non-state actors in trade flows.

Ways Forward

The findings of this report demonstrate that economic concerns cannot and should not be decoupled from security concerns in Africa. To effectively address the security and development challenges facing the continent, it is essential for scholars and policymakers to explore and incorporate indigenous frameworks that are rooted in local realities and consider transnational linkages. This requires not only understanding the various actors involved but also actively engaging informal networks and structures to facilitate mobility, trade, and regional cooperation in the realm of security.

Moreover, while ad-hoc initiatives can contribute to addressing transnational security threats, it is vital to strike a balance that ensures security efforts do not impede development. It is equally important to integrate measures that enhance security within development and social initiatives. By embracing these inclusive and holistic approaches, stakeholders can collaborate towards a more secure and prosperous future for Africa.

The authors of this report remain committed to ongoing collaboration with African scholars, policy practitioners, and individuals interested in this field as we strive to further expand the frontiers of research, practice, and analysis. Future workshops will continue to prioritize incorporating diverse perspectives to promote community-engaged scholarship that centers on a human rights-based approach in framing sustainable security responses. We encourage institutions, scholars, policymakers, and those interested in advancing this conversation to utilize our findings as a foundation for informing future research and projects.

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About African Wars in the 21st Century

“The workshop, “African Wars in the 21st Century...,” is part of a bigger project that focuses on understanding and assessing the effectiveness of African security frameworks and various civil-military interactions in the context of fragility and peace recovery. Thus, workshops are centered on bringing together scholars, policy analysts, civil society and international organization representatives to discuss the changing landscape of security threats as well as opportunities for state leaders to reimagine human security and stabilization mechanisms. In this workshop, sessions were specifically designed to delve into indigenous economic practices and informal networks as means of stabilization; regional ad-hoc initiatives; and the role of private actors in shaping regional security responses. The objective was to gather diverse perspectives, encourage reflection and debates, and propose solutions to address the growing regionalization of conflicts while also recognizing the social and economic dimensions of insecurity in reimagining regional security and economic development responses.

The workshop was attended by over 20 participants, representing the following institutions:

- Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS)
- Agence Française de Développement
- Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center
- The Institute for Security Studies (ISS Africa)
- The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)
- The Joint Civil-Military Interaction (JCMI) Research and Education Network
- Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC)
- New York University, Africa House
- New York University, Center for Global Affairs
- New York University, Center for the Study of Africa and the African Diaspora
- The Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)
- Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey
- Salve Regina University
- Stake Experts
- The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) Africa Borderlands Centre
- The United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (UNOSAA)
- The University of Birmingham
- Université Paris-Dauphin, Développement, Institutions et Mondialisation (DIAL)
- The University of Zambia

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