

Connectivity: the path to strengthening peace in Africa

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Tomorrow (29 February), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is set to convene its 1203rd session to deliberate on the theme 'connectivity: the path to strengthening peace in Africa' at a ministerial level.

Nasser Bourita, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates of the Kingdom of Morocco and Chairperson of the PSC for February 2024 is expected to deliver opening remarks. This will be followed by remarks from Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS). Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Special Representative of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General to the AU and Head of the UN Office to the AU (UNOAU) is also expected to make a statement. Amani Abou-Zeid, Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy; Albert M. Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry; Nardos Bekele-Thomas, Chief Executive Officer of AUDA-NEPAD; Akinwumi A. Adesina, President of the African Development Bank; and the representative of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) are also expected to make statements.

This session, being convened for the first time under the specific framing, offers a key opportunity for the PSC to shift focus from the traditional security-centric approach, which often proves inadequate in addressing the complex peace and security challenges facing the continent, to a holistic approach that underpins the peace-security-development nexus. The session also provides a platform for PSC Members to critically reflect on how various forms of connectivity—such as air, rail, road, and digital networks—can be leveraged as

vital pathways for promoting regional integration, development, and ultimately, contributing to continental peace and stability.

Agenda 2063, Africa's blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future, highlights the imperative of regional integration as a key pillar in Africa's pursuit of inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development. Aspiration 2 specifically emphasizes the need for Africa to develop world class infrastructure that criss-crosses Africa and which will improve connectivity through newer and bolder initiatives to link the continent by rail, road, sea and air, and developing regional and continental power pools, as well as information and communications technology (ICT). Agenda 2063 also outlines key flagship programmes aimed at enhancing connectivity and boosting economic growth and development. These include: the Integrated High Speed Train Network, the Grand Inga Dam Project, establishment of a Single African Air-Transport Market SAATM, the Pan-African E-Network, and cyber security.

Moreover, in July 2012, the AU Assembly adopted the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), a continental roadmap aimed at advancing regional and continental infrastructure (energy, transport, ICT, and trans-boundary water resources) from 2012 to 2040. The overarching objective is to facilitate continental integration in Africa, promote socio-economic development and poverty reduction through improved connectivity. In this context, in addition to highlighting how enhanced connectivity could contribute to the peace and stability of the continent, PSC Members can use the session as an opportunity to hear from the AU Commission and Member States on the progress made in the implementation of flagship projects outlined in Agenda 2063 and PIDA, as well as regional and national infrastructural initiatives aimed at fostering continental connectivity.

Indeed, connectivity emerges as paramount for facilitating the

movement of goods, services, and people across the continent, enabling increased trade and economic integration, ultimately driving economic development, poverty reduction, and advancing the path to peace and stability in the continent. The concept note prepared for the session rightly notes that connectivity contributes to both stimulating economic growth and reducing factors that can fuel conflicts, such as poverty, youth unemployment, and inequality. It further highlights that a stronger and more integrated economy can act as a stabilizing factor by mitigating tensions and conflicts related to poverty and employment.

Currently, Africa lags behind in overall infrastructure growth and connectivity, with significant costs to its economic potential. According to a [report](#), transport prices in Africa are estimated to be 50 to 175% higher than global averages, consuming over 20% of foreign earnings. The poor infrastructure is projected to reduce productivity across the continent by as much as 40%, leading to an annual reduction of national economic growth by 2%.

Digital connectivity also plays a key role in Africa's economic transformation. According to econometric studies conducted by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), even a modest 10% increase in mobile broadband penetration across Africa could yield a 2.5% increase in GDP per capita. Moreover, elevating internet penetration to 70% has the potential to spark a 9% surge in job creation compared to current levels. In 2023, World Bank's flagship [report](#) underscored these effects, revealing that in Nigeria and Tanzania, exposure to internet coverage for three or more years led to a notable 7% reduction in extreme poverty, while labor force participation and wage employment saw an uptick of up to 8%. Given that education is the AU's theme of the year, the session may particularly emphasize how connectivity, both in general and digital connectivity in particular, could deepen peace and security by promoting enhanced education in

Africa.

Over the years, Africa has made remarkable strides in enhancing connectivity. In this respect, the AU-AUDA-NEPAD first ten-year PIDA implementation report reveals the significant increase in transport, energy, ICT and transboundary water resource infrastructure in the continent over the last ten years. 16,066 Km of road and 4,077 Km of railways have been developed, meeting 52% and 14% of the 2040 PIDA target, respectively. In the energy sector, 3,506 Km of transmission lines were installed with 7 GW hydro-electric generation capacity, achieving 13% of the 2040 target. In addition, over the past two decades, the continent has witnessed an unprecedented surge in internet adoption and connectivity, outpacing global averages. According to the World Bank, Sub-Saharan Africa experienced a remarkable [115 percent increase](#) in internet users from 2016 to 2021. Fuelled by these advancements, young Africans are leveraging cutting-edge technologies to launch innovative startups and address longstanding challenges across the continent. From the pioneering mobile banking services in Kenya to the life-saving medication deliveries facilitated by drones in Rwanda, Africa is witnessing a flourishing ecosystem of successful technological innovation.

Despite some positive developments, significant challenges persist. One such challenge is the lack of political commitment to allocate adequate resources for infrastructure investment. For instance, Amani Abou-Zeid highlighted during the recent Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Transport, Transcontinental and Interregional Infrastructure, and Energy that African governments have only dedicated approximately 3.5% of their GDP to infrastructure development over the last 20 years. This pales in comparison to China and India, who respectively allocate 7.7% and 5.2% of their GDP to infrastructure. Furthermore, African countries allocate a mere 1.1% of their

GDP to digital investment, significantly lower than the 3.2% average observed in advanced economies. These statistics underscore the critical importance of increasing infrastructure investments in Africa to fully unlock its economic potential and promote peace and security.

The other challenge is the low involvement of the private sector. This is particularly evident from PIDA ten-year implementation report where the contribution of the private sector amounted to only 3% of the necessary financing, which is USD 67.9 billion, for the implementation of first phase PIDA projects. Enhancing the private sector in the investment on infrastructure indeed requires establishing conducive and predictable policies and regulatory frameworks.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a communiqué. Among others, the PSC is expected to reiterate the intrinsic linkages between peace, security and development, stressing the need to prioritize a holistic approach to address the underlying causes of conflicts in Africa. In this context, it may highlight the contribution of connectivity to both stimulating economic growth and reducing factors that can fuel tension and conflicts, such as poverty, youth unemployment, and inequality. Echoing the 4th Ordinary Session of the STC on Transport, Transcontinental and Interregional Infrastructure, and Energy, held in September 2023, the PSC may emphasize the need for harmonizing strategies, strengthening cooperation and accelerating implementation of projects to facilitate access to modern, sustainable, climate-resilient and universal access to infrastructure services with the view to enhancing connectivity and achieving the goals of Agenda 2063. Furthermore, the PSC may specifically underscore the concept of the 'Integrated Corridor Approach', a multi-infrastructure corridor approach to infrastructure development that works toward a more prosperous Africa by emphasizing projects that maximize job creation and climate friendliness. Finally, the aspiration of Agenda 2063 to develop world class

infrastructure that criss-crosses Africa and improve connectivity cannot be realized without commitment of huge resources. The PSC thus may underscore a need for leveraging Africa's partnerships such as FOCAC, TICAD and the role of Africa's financial institutions such as the African Development Bank and the building of public private partnerships as critical avenue for mobilizing funds.