

POLICY BRIEF

WHY THE AU HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT MATTERS AND WHAT IT CAN DO ABOUT THE CONCERNING HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AFRICA

AMANI AFRICA

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I INTRODUCTION

On 27 May 2022, the African Union (AU) will hold an extraordinary humanitarian summit and pledging conference in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. This summit and its thematic focus on the humanitarian situation in Africa could not have been more timely. It is taking place at a time when the humanitarian situation has deteriorated beyond the levels witnessed in previous eras.

The origin of this summit is to be traced back to both the AU theme for the year 2019 for which Equatorial Guinea was a champion and AU's 38th Ordinary session in February 2021, during which the Executive Council expressed support to 'the offer made by the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to organize a continental humanitarian summit and donor's/pledging conference in Equatorial Guinea with the view to preventing forced displacement and searching for solutions and called on the Commission to extend the necessary support'. Endorsing this Executive Council decision, the 35th Ordinary Session of the Assembly held in February 2022 decided to convene the summit on 27 May 2022.¹

This policy brief aims at presenting the humanitarian situation in the continent by illustrating some of the key trends and the various manifestations of the crisis. Apart from the data and analysis that it presents on the worsening humanitarian context, the brief also highlights the factors driving the situation. To provide additional external input for the deliberation of AU member states during the summit, the policy brief concludes by outlining policy options and recommendations for immediate and coordinated action to contain the growing humanitarian need.

II THE STATE OF THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AFRICA

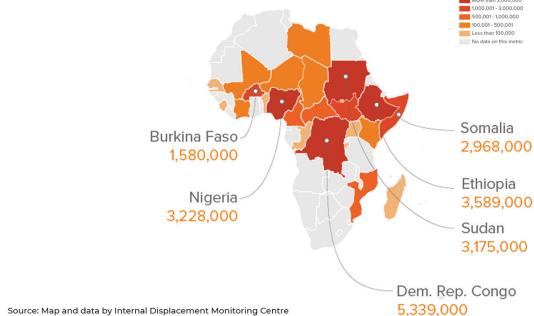
The humanitarian situation in the continent has continued to increasingly deteriorate over the past half a decade. In 2021, the persistence of existing humanitarian crises and the emergence of new ones has been witnessed. Various data sources show that about a quarter of a billion people on the continent are affected by the deteriorating humanitarian situation. According to data provided by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 61.5 million people in west and central Africa will require humanitarian assistance and protection in 2022. The figure for southern and eastern Africa is 47.6 million. For north Africa the figure is about one million.

The crisis of displacement is one of the manifestations of the deteriorating humanitarian situation on the continent. Authoritative data sources on displacement show that more people in the world have been forced to flee their homes in 2021 than ever recorded. More people are displaced on record in 2021 is also true for Africa. From the global figure of 53 million displaced people due to conflict, over 25 million are in Africa. About 20 million of these were from six African countries namely Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, DRC and Somalia.² Other countries where a surge in the number of displaced people is registered in 2021 include CAR, Chad, Mali, Mozambique and South Sudan.

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AU Decision Assembly/AU/Dec.828(XXXV)

² Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2022



Displacement in 2021

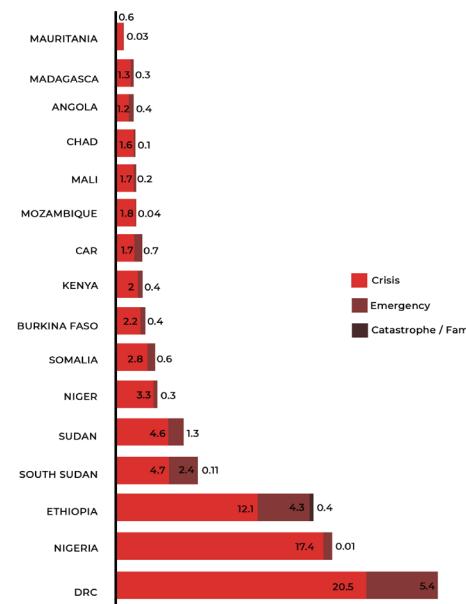
The AU in its February 2021 report stated that during the first half of 2021, 'Africa witnessed new internal displacements globally as conflict and violence flared in several member states across the continent. Some 1.3 million new displacements were recorded in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Ethiopia, conflict in the Tigray region and increasing insecurity in other parts of the country triggered more than 1.2 million new displacements.' It is worth noting that by the end of 2021 this figure has increased substantially below 4 million people displaced, registering almost more than 100% increase from 2020.

The AU in its report pointed out that 'new displacements also occurred within the following member states in Burkina Faso, there were 120,000 displaced persons in the first six months of 2021, in Central African Republic there were 202,000 displaced persons. In the northern province of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique conflict continued unabated, displacing over 120,000 Internally Displaced persons and in Nigeria 165,000 Internally Displaced and South Sudan where 170,000 people were internally displaced.'

Another growing area of humanitarian concern on the continent is food insecurity. During the past few years, the scale of food insecurity on the continent has become alarming. At the end of 2021, the AU, the Food and Agricultural Agency, the UN Economic Commission for Africa reported that while the hunger situation on the continent has been worsening since 2013, it witnessed the most deterioration during 2019 and 2020. According to the three entities, 281.6 million Africans are undernourished in 2020. They warned that the situation will deteriorate further in 2021. Confirming this warning, early last month, the ICRC announced that the food security crisis in Africa has reached a disaster level that has gone unnoticed. In terms of the magnitude of this increase, the ICRC reported that

346 million people (one in four Africans) are facing severe food insecurity. Indications are that this trend of worsening food insecurity will continue in 2022 as well. Coupled with the fact that Africa is identified as one of the two regions in the world that registered the lowest public investment in agriculture, this trend will mean that there is going to be regression in terms of the sustainable development goals target of ending hunger by 2030. According to AU data from the 3rd Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) biennial review unveiled despite progress made by one-third of 51 AU member states, only one is on track to achieve the ending hunger target.

As the graph below from WFP/FAO shows many of the countries in the world facing the severe categories of crisis, emergency and famine are to be found in Africa. According to this data three of four countries (Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen) in the world suffering the worst food insecurity crisis are in Africa.³



Countries with acute food insecurity

This already dire food insecurity has been further worsened due to the current global crisis and the war in Ukraine. FAO food price index indicated that world food prices jumped nearly 13 percent in March to a new record high as the war in Ukraine continues to rage. Given the already difficult food security situation and the dependence of many countries on imports of

³ According to the WFP/FAO classification of the gravity of food insecurity Ethiopia is one of the countries that has a level of severity categorized as catastrophe/famine

agricultural products and fertilizer from Russia and Ukraine, Africa is facing a disproportionate impact on its development as well as security situations. Apart from its adverse impact on the already dire food insecurity particularly in conflict settings in Africa, the socio-economic pressure that ensues from rising food prices is feared to create further fertile ground for social tension and instability.

III CONFLICT AS THE MAJOR DRIVER OF THE HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND SHRINKING SPACE FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Armed conflict and political violence remain the main source of the worsening humanitarian crises on the continent. The dire humanitarian situation in the 1990s prompted the AU to state that conflicts forced 'millions of our people, including women and children, into a drifting life as refugees and internally displaced persons, deprived of their means of livelihood, human dignity and hope.' Unfortunately, more people are forced into such a drifting life as refugees and internally displaced persons in 2021 than in the 1990s due to conflict and political violence, highlighting the outrageous level of the cost of conflicts to civilians who bore much of the brunt of the violence and insecurity on the continent.

The recent dramatic deterioration in the humanitarian situation is in the main a result of the increase in the number of conflicts, the impact of conflicts as reflected by the surge in number of fatalities and people forced to flee their homes and the expansion in the geographic spread of conflicts.⁴ As the AU report on the humanitarian situation in Africa observed, further deterioration of the humanitarian situation is anticipated in some of the current crises. The worsening of the humanitarian situation and the expanding challenges to humanitarian access for delivering assistance to those in need are on their own serious peace and security concerns. Additionally, these conditions also exacerbate conflicts and insecurity and make the resolution of conflicts more difficult, as the conflict in northern Ethiopia shows. Across

various regions of the continent facing deteriorating humanitarian situation, challenges to humanitarian action are increasingly becoming more and more complex as insecurity not only pushes humanitarian needs up but also impedes effective humanitarian action.

The challenge is not simply the worsening of the humanitarian situation in Africa. Of equal concern is the declining capacity and increasingly constrained space for delivering humanitarian assistance to people in need. The AU in its February 2022 report observed that 'conflict and insecurity continued to be major constraints to humanitarian access and operations, in particular the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan. Insecurity caused by extremist groups who maintained strongholds in the Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger tricorder area also adversely affected humanitarian operations around the Sahel region.' The lack of cooperation of conflict parties with humanitarian actors and their failure to guarantee unhindered humanitarian access are aggravating already dire humanitarian situation. In some cases, as in the conflict in northern Ethiopia, these severe constraints to humanitarian access create tragic consequences as those without humanitarian assistance are condemned to starve to death or perish from lack of access to medicine or health care.

This situation imposes double burden on the civilian population arising from, on the one hand, the vulnerabilities and threats that emanate from violent conflicts, and on the other from the active impediment of access to humanitarian aid. Moreover, the growing trend of attacks on medical personnel and facilities as well as humanitarian actors by parties to conflicts, either as a deliberate military strategy or due to poor training in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) norms is an aspect that is further complicating humanitarian action.

The use of unconventional means and methods of warfare, particularly the increasing use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) has also been a major threat to civilians and their livestock, not only claiming thousands of civilian causalities, but also disrupting the main means of sustaining their livelihoods. Furthermore, the use of IEDs poses a specific challenge to humanitarian workers in the discharge of their duties and becomes a hindrance for the provision of much needed humanitarian services to populations in

⁴ Amani Africa Special Research Report, *The Major Peace and Security Issues in Africa on the 20th Anniversary of the African Union, March 2022 (Report no.11)*

need.

The specific case of the food security crisis in Africa

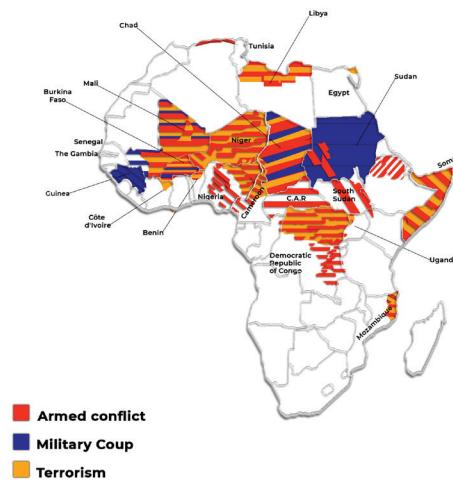
Conflict continues to be the major factor that leads to and accelerates food insecurity. Certainly, the relationship between conflict and starvation or hunger is non-linear. However, it is now adequately established that conflict is the main driver of hunger and starvation in conflict affected countries. Conflicts produce hunger and starvation both directly and indirectly.

Often the contribution of conflicts to hunger and starvation is indirect. Such is the case where conflict disrupts food production and/or trading of agricultural produce. The insecurity arising from fighting often means that people could not farm nor source food sources from the market as fighting also disrupts flow of goods from conflict free areas. Conflict also indirectly induces hunger and starvation as fighting limits the distribution of humanitarian assistance.

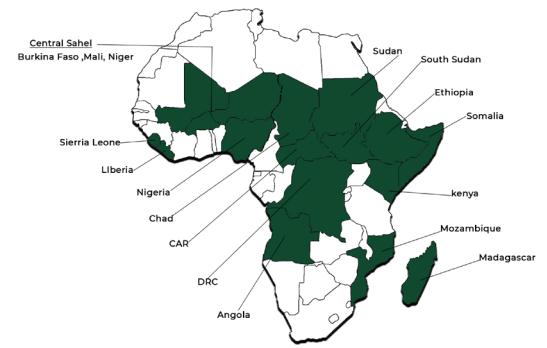
However, increasingly conflicts also directly cause hunger and starvation due to the actions of conflict parties. Indeed, one of the main causes of hunger and starvation in conflict situations is the direct or indirect restriction that conflict parties impose on humanitarian access including through deliberate targeting of humanitarian actors and/or the blockade of humanitarian access. Such cases were reported in relation to the war in South Sudan during 2013-2015 and in the conflict in northern Ethiopia. Conflict also directly contributes to hunger and starvation where conflict parties deliberately target crops, livestock and other food sources on which the civilian population depend for their survival. Similar conditions also emerge where conflict parties use food as weapon of war not only by deliberately destroying food sources and agricultural infrastructure but also by preventing people from producing food and/or from having access to food.

As the data from various sources shows, much of the most severe conditions of food insecurity in Africa, as in other parts of the world, are in territories affected by conflict. Indeed there is a direct correlation between the conflict map and the food insecurity map of Africa as depicted in the maps below. The report on 'Hunger

Hotspots' identifies 'conflict or organized violence' as the 'key drivers of acute food insecurity' in countries/territories on the continent notably CAR, Central Sahel, eastern DRC, northern Ethiopia, northern Nigeria, northern Mozambique, Somalia, the Sudan, and South Sudan. According to FAO and WFP data, out of the 15 countries having populations of more than 1.5 million facing acute food insecurity, all except three are countries experiencing conflict. It is therefore little surprise that there is direct convergence between the conflict map of Africa and the map of 'acute food insecurity hotspots' on the continent.



Conflict and Crises in Africa



Acute Food Insecurity Hotspots in Africa

The role of conflict as major driver of severe food insecurity becomes particularly clear in its relationship with the emergence of famine conditions. The emergence of famine conditions or risks of famine is mainly attributable to conflicts. Thus, during the past decade the places on the continent where the existence of famine conditions has been declared are all in countries experiencing conflicts in parts of their territory. In 2011, the food insecurity in Somalia was considered to have created famine conditions. Similarly, all of the four famines or near famine situations except one (Yemen) that the UN declared in 2017 were in Africa,

all of them countries with territories affected by conflict. These were Somalia, South Sudan and north-east Nigeria. According to FAO and WFP, this year as well all of the four countries except one (Yemen) that have the highest alert level and with parts of their populations identified or projected to experience starvation and death are in Africa. In the latest list, Ethiopia, where in its Tigray region UN reported in 2021 the emergence of famine like conditions, is added to two (South Sudan and north-east Nigeria) of the countries identified in the 2017 UN data.

The use of starvation as a tactic of war and destruction of agricultural inputs, products and infrastructure in some context of armed conflicts is very concerning and is capable of creating the grave circumstances envisaged in Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act of the AU. The Geneva Conventions clearly prohibit starvation of civilians as a method of combat. They further prohibit attacking, destroying, removing, or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of civilian population, such as foodstuffs and agricultural areas. Attacking humanitarian actors and blocking or interfering with humanitarian access are also contrary to human rights and humanitarian law standards.

IV OTHER FACTORS DRIVING THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Climate change and COVID19

The effects of climate change compounded with pre-existing vulnerability is causing dire natural disasters and consequently itself causing and aggravating humanitarian crisis. The interplay between erratic weather patterns in the form of heavy precipitation, flood, drought, as well as demographic dynamics and conflict have further exacerbated food insecurity, displacement and sparked humanitarian crisis in various regions of the continent. The impact of climate change induced disasters have triggered massive displacement in the continent. By the end of 2021, more than two million people have been displaced in Africa due to disasters and half of that displacement occurred in just two countries: South Sudan and Ethiopia.⁵

A notable pattern in these data is that the same countries that are experiencing high level of

displacement due to conflict are the countries facing similar challenges of high displacement due to climate induced disasters. There is indeed a growing recognition of the close link between climate change, insecurity and humanitarian crisis. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report concludes that 'even with moderate climate change people in vulnerable regions will experience a further erosion of livelihood security that can interact with humanitarian crises, such as displacement and forced migration...and violent conflict'.⁶

These developments necessitate a climate-sensitive humanitarian action. Considering that humanitarian action is predominantly undertaken in places that are highly vulnerable and exposed to climate shocks, humanitarian policy and action has to adequately address and integrate climate and environmental risks to provide a more a coherent response to interrelated problems.

The other related challenge that has contributed to the growing humanitarian crisis in the continent is the COVID19 pandemic. It has not only exacerbated existing humanitarian challenges but also significantly constrained response measures. The limitation on movement has affected the timely delivery of aid and lifesaving assistance to communities. Displaced population have urgent needs and any disruption of services to respond to such needs is an existential threat. The socio-economic fallout for COVID19 has been particularly negative on already vulnerable communities namely IDPs and refugees. The AU, for example reported that, 'the socioeconomic situation for Sahrawi refugees living in the five camps near Tindouf in Algeria further deteriorated as a result of COVID19. Camp-based refugees reported widespread losses of income, jobs, and shortages of cash.'⁷ The effects are also dire on this specific groups given their inability to access water, sanitation, health care services, as well as vaccines.

Volatile Global Order and Its Impact on Humanitarian Response

External factors have also significantly affected the humanitarian action in Africa. As the continent

⁶ IPCC, *Climate Change 2022 Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*

⁷ AU Report of the Commission on the Humanitarian Situation in Africa, AU Doc EXCL/1314(XL) 6, (February 2022).

struggles with an acutely rising humanitarian crisis, national, regional and international response has unfortunately been constrained over the past couple of years, due to the negative socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 pandemic. In African countries where resilience of populations has already been frustrated due to conflicts, economic shocks, natural disasters and weak national public health infrastructure and collapsing social services, the Covid-19 pandemic not only exacerbated the existing humanitarian crisis, but also became an impediment to the provision of humanitarian assistance. For instance, studies conducted on in-camp and urban-based refugees in Kenya demonstrate that measures taken to control the spread of the pandemic have had disproportionately negative impacts on employment rates of these refugees, particularly refugee women. In this context policy pronouncement by the PSC during its 92¹st session on the importance of ensuring part of the AU Covid-19 Response Fund is directed towards assisting refugees, IDPs, undocumented migrants and other vulnerable parts of society was a significant step.

Worse still, humanitarian response in the continent is likely to show further decline in the near future if the Russia-Ukraine war continues to escalate. Africa being heavily reliant on both of these countries for the import of essential food items including basic cereals and oil, the price shocks and disruptions to supply chains are already being felt. As African governments struggle to meet development and humanitarian needs under such circumstances, they may face further challenges due to cuts in humanitarian and development aids coming from funding partners such as the European Union (EU), who may be cornered towards re-prioritizing and pulling humanitarian finances from other crises in order to meet growing needs in Ukraine.

V CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data and analysis presented in the foregoing sections demonstrates the need for an immediate and coordinated response. As the heads of states and government convene for the Humanitarian Summit and Pledging Conference, in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, the following are the policy measures that are worth adopting to address the twin challenges of increasing humanitarian need and narrowing space

for effective humanitarian action.

Enhancing the advocacy role of the AU and its humanitarian diplomacy

It is imperative to address both the factors exacerbating humanitarian crises and those that impede humanitarian access. At the political and policy level, it is critical to recognize that addressing the humanitarian consequences of conflicts and violence contributes to creating conditions for resolutions of conflicts. This necessitates that the AU invests its diplomatic and institutional capital as much in mobilizing efforts for addressing the humanitarian fallout of conflicts as in efforts for resolving the conflicts. On the other hand, the AU should play a critical role towards demanding and promoting the expansion of humanitarian space so that aid can reach people in need.

Similarly, there is also the issue of enhancing AU's role in humanitarian diplomacy as both a tool for preventing the emergence of conditions that lead to humanitarian crisis and hunger and in mitigating or averting those conditions once they arise. This would include advocating for mobilization of support for people in humanitarian crisis and the use of diplomatic missions for facilitating unhindered humanitarian access, securing guarantee from conflict parties for safe, free and voluntary passage for civilians in conflict settings to areas where they can access assistance, respect for and full cooperation with humanitarian actors and compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law standards. This can also be done by the development of a strategy for the effective use of humanitarian diplomacy by the AU as a dedicated humanitarian diplomacy toolbox which can be an outcome of the Malabo summit.

Operationalizing existing humanitarian policies

The AU possess a number of policies and norms pertaining to enhancing humanitarian action in the continent. These existing resources should be used to secure and facilitate unhindered and full humanitarian access, particularly in situations where access is impeded by conditions attributable to conflict parties. The AU should call on and urge member states to uphold humanitarian principles enshrined in various continental and global norms. It should also be noted

that a robust humanitarian action is in line with AU's foundational value and principle of non-indifference to the plight of people that continue to suffer in humanitarian crisis.

Coordination between AU and RECs on humanitarian action

Towards strengthening efforts in humanitarian actions it remains critical that the AU works closely and in coordination with the various RECs. The existing effort around bringing coordination between AU and RECs should also be applied in the context of humanitarian situations. Regional actor's proximity to crisis and humanitarian situations will be an advantage to have an effective response. Moreover, policy coordination amongst various actors and a harmonized response mechanism is critical for the timely and efficient delivery of assistance.

Operationalizing Institutional Mechanisms

The AU should fast track the operationalization of the African Humanitarian Agency. This is critical to the extent that it will endow the AU with a dedicated agency that assumes full responsibility for leading AU's efforts in mobilizing responses to humanitarian crisis in Africa and facilitate coordination with humanitarian actors. In the light of the grim humanitarian situation in Africa, one of the issues that requires attention is the strengthening AU's humanitarian architecture as outlined in African Common Position on Humanitarian Effectiveness.

Harnessing the complementary role of various structures

While the upcoming AU extraordinary summit is hoped to play its role towards the operationalization of the African Humanitarian Agency (AUHA) and mobilization of resources, it also remains important to ensure operationalization as well as harnessing in a coordinated form the role of relevant structures such as the Special Emergency Assistance Fund (SEAF), Africa Risk Capacity (ARC) and the PRC Sub-committee on the Special Emergency Assistance Fund for Drought and Famine Relief in Africa. Particularly, in respect to the AUHA ensuring its regional presence once its

operationalised, through the formation of "Regional Humanitarian Centres in the five geographical Regions of the AU, to enable close cooperation with AU Member States and RECs/RMs at National and Regional Level".

Humanitarian Financing

Ensuring sustainable financing, mobilization of resources commensurate with the humanitarian crisis will be a key area for the extraordinary summit expected to take place in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. The current global crisis has taken a lot of policy attention and funding from addressing humanitarian crisis in the continent. The impact of the de-prioritization of the humanitarian crises in Africa will further reduce the already limited funding available for humanitarian action and severely hamper the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need. Hence the Summit may also reflect on funding related challenges within the context of such global dynamics and mobilize the international community to ensure humanitarian action in Africa remains a priority. This also necessitates for Africa to build resilience to external shocks, more particularly with respect to factors such as the impact of the war in Ukraine, the AU may call for international cooperation for establishing emergency plans and platforms for financing and facilitating access to agricultural products and inputs.

In terms of financing particularly for addressing the food crisis on the continent, the Assembly should reaffirm the determination of member states for the implementation of the commitments made under the CAADP. It is to be recalled that African countries pledged to allocate at least 10 percent of their national budget to agriculture and rural development, as well as to achieve agricultural growth rates of at least 6 percent per annum. In the prevailing disruption of global agricultural supply chain, it is also critical increasing agricultural productivity and enhance intra-continental trade to boost financial resources and to build resilience.

African Ownership, Leadership and Localization of Humanitarian Action

Often the expectation for humanitarian action both in continental and global humanitarian discourse is humanitarian support has to come from global humanitarian actors. While the role of the global humanitarian actors is important also critical is the assumption of responsibility and leadership for humanitarian response by African state and non-state actors. This can have three elements. The first is the domestic mobilization of resources for humanitarian purposes. The second is normative. Given the pan-African norm of non-indifference and 'I am my brother's keeper', when humanitarian needs arise there is no other part of the world that needs to mobilize first than Africa. When the AU was founded, it was premised on the principle of non-indifference. This principle promises to people in Africa that the AU will not stand by and watch when people in Africa face a disaster. African ownership and leadership and intra-African solidarity are also amongst the major operational principles of the AU. The third is the creation of space and the provision of support for mobilization of public opinion on humanitarian needs and for the organization and effective functioning of African humanitarian actors. This should not only tap into the role of African non-state actors but also support the development and organization of African entities engaged in supporting humanitarian action into first responders and providers of humanitarian support.



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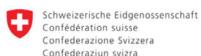
ABOUT AMANI AFRICA

Amani Africa is an independent African based policy research, training and consulting think tank with a specialization and primary focus on African multilateral policy processes, particularly those relating to the African Union.

We support the pan-African dream of peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa through research, training, strategic communications, technical advisory services, and convening and facilitation.

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