# CHAPTER 4

## Beyond Aid: The Double-Edged Sword of Development Partnerships in the East African Community

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### Introduction

Since the cataclysm of the Second World War, cooperation between nations has become the cornerstone of a more peaceful and interconnected global order, as articulated in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter (United Nations Charter 1945). The Charter remains a foundational instrument of contemporary international law, fostering cooperation and peaceful relations among states. Its architects sought to establish a harmonious international system grounded in collaboration and the reduction of inter-state tensions, recognising that cooperation was essential to advancing the economic and social well-being of all peoples.

International treaties play a crucial role in advancing the objectives of the global community and strengthening peaceful cooperation among nations. These agreements provide frameworks for addressing shared challenges, promoting economic development and safeguarding human rights. By establishing common rules and standards, treaties contribute to a more stable and interconnected international order, as reflected in the Preamble to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961).

Similarly, the East African Community's slogan, "One People,

One Destiny", reflects its aspiration for collective action and shared regional objectives, as articulated in the Preamble to the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community (East African Community [EAC] 1999).

In addition to the East African Community (EAC), other regional organisations, notably the African Union (AU), have championed African unity as a means of achieving shared continental objectives. These organisations recognise that unity remains indispensable to Africa's development and prosperity. The framers of the Abuja Treaty envisaged economic integration, including the establishment of a single customs union, as fundamental to building a self-reliant and self-sustaining African economy, as reflected in Article 4(1) of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (East African Community [EAC] 1991). This initiative was intended to stimulate economic activity and strengthen trade linkages among African states.

The Abuja Treaty further provides for a six-stage progression towards economic integration, culminating in a continental customs union. As set out under Article 6 of the EAC (1991), the process begins with strengthening existing Regional Economic Communities (REC), followed by the progressive elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers, the establishment of continental free trade arrangements, the harmonisation of trade policies, the creation of an African Common Market and the consolidation of its institutional structures (EAC 1991).

This integration architecture cannot be regarded as effortless; rather, it represents a deliberate institutional response to the principles of interdependence, cooperation and tolerance among nation-states, as articulated in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter (United Nations Charter 1945), while simultaneously promoting peace and justice. The EAC forms part of the RECs recognised under the Abuja framework and over the past decades, has been acknowledged as one of the fastest-growing regions. The East Africa Community has further been commended for establishing both a customs union and a common market, developments that collectively signal progress towards the aspiration of a political federation.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of "state cooperation,"

the EAC Treaty defines cooperation as the undertaking by Partner States, jointly or in concert, of activities in furtherance of the objectives of the Community (EAC Treaty 1999, Art. 1). A purposive interpretation of this definition suggests a broader scope of application that may extend to cooperation with foreign states. In the contemporary international order, developing states frequently require external support to achieve their development objectives. Scholars note that international organisations both intergovernmental and multilateral have increasingly assumed financing and facilitative roles in state cooperation, grounded in burden-sharing and collective advancement (Schiff and Winters 2012).

While cooperation with external partners may appear strategic and beneficial, structural imbalances persist between African states and major global powers. Disparities in bargaining power and economic leverage risk placing African states in positions of dependency. Such imbalances constrain Africa's economic agency and may weaken the developmental gains derived from international engagements. Scholarship observes that Africa has historically been subjected to patterns of external exploitation dating back to the early 1500s (Terreblanche 2011). The enduring legacy of transatlantic slavery, including the forced displacement of over fifteen million Africans to Europe and the Americas, deprived the continent of significant human capital, and left deep social and economic scars (Terreblanche 2011).

Therefore, this study looks at the relations between the EAC and the big powers, analysing the agreements between Africa and the big powers (USA, Germany, China, United Kingdom, Japan and Russia) and how they have affected the EAC both in terms of development and future goals (Vision 2050). The study discusses the contributions of these agreements and their negative impacts on the community, looking at the burdens and recommending the best for community and African development. This is done by analysing reports, agreements, investment treaties and agendas in big conferences.

## Background of the EAC

The collapse of the former EAC was a significant setback to regional

development and marked a rupture in the historical relations among the states of the Lake Region (the Republic of Uganda, the Republic of Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania), as reflected in the Preamble to the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community (EAC 1999) and under Article 14.02 of the Mediation Agreement for the Disposition of Assets (Mediation Agreement for the Disposition of Assets 1984). However, the enduring historical ties among these states explain the present integration of the partner states of the EAC, as reaffirmed in the Preamble to the EAC Treaty (EAC 1999).

Echoing the adage "old wine in new bottles", the EAC represents a modern reincarnation of its earlier integration framework, which was dissolved in the 1970s. The objective of this revival was to reintegrate the region and avoid the shortcomings of the past, as provided under Article 2 of the EAC Treaty (EAC 1999). The revival process formally commenced with the establishment of the Agreement for the Establishment of the Permanent Tripartite Commission for Cooperation among the founding states.

The establishment of the Tripartite Commission aimed at coordinating activities to deepen cooperation in political, social, economic and security spheres. The Tripartite Commission laid the institutional foundation for the eventual revival of the EAC in the late 1990s. The revival was formalised through the signing of the EAC Treaty, whereby the partner states agreed on various areas of cooperation, including those set out under Articles 102 and 105 of the EAC Treaty (EAC 1999).

These areas of cooperation include agriculture, human resource development, science and technology, food security and legal and judicial affairs.

The framers of the EAC Treaty were conscious that cooperation is not possible without a driving force for their attainment. The Treaty sets several fundamental principles to guide the partner states and the EAC in achieving its set goals. The EAC partner states vow to take into account the principles of mutual trust, peaceful co-existence, peaceful settlement of disputes and good governance including adherence to the principles of the rule of law, accountability and the principles of justice (EAC 1999: art 6).

The EAC, like any other diverse society, operates on the principles of

people-centeredness, conducive policies, an export-oriented economy, equitable distribution of benefits, and the principle of subsidiarity allowing for multi-level participation and involving many stakeholders in the process (EAC 1999: art 7). The legal instruments of the EAC enable the partner states to cooperate on the agreed-upon areas to harness development in the EAC.

The cooperation provided in the Treaty is aimed at concreting the integration amongst partner states of the EAC. The EAC, in furthering this agenda, works closely with development partners and other international communities (EAC 1999: art 130[3]). Development partners, however, must have an interest in the objectives of the EAC. They enter bilateral agreements with the EAC to carry on development projects and capacity building that the EAC would otherwise miss out on in a timely basis.

## *The EAC and development partners*

This section outlines and discusses the involvement of development partners and other big powers in the affairs of the EAC. Their role in the development of the community, the opportunities available, their contribution to the EAC's growth, plans and the challenges that come as a result of such engagements.

The EAC, as reflected in the Preamble to the EAC Treaty (EAC 1999), was initially formed by three founding partner states—Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Pursuant to Article 3(3) of the Treaty, its membership has since expanded to eight partner states (EAC 1999: art 3[3]). All partner states are situated within sub-Saharan Africa, a region comprising 48 countries, of which 33 are classified as Least Developed Countries. The region continues to face significant socio-economic challenges, including poverty, disease, food insecurity and recurring conflicts. A substantial proportion of the population lives below the international poverty threshold, limiting access to basic needs and clean water.

In response to these structural challenges, the EAC continually engages development partners and regional blocs to facilitate coordinated infrastructure projects and development initiatives (EAC 2024a). Development partners have invested in programmes aimed at poverty

reduction, healthcare improvement, promotion of democracy and the rule of law, food security, employment creation and peace and security (EAC 2024b). The EAC has strategically refocussed its partnerships to better respond to the needs of East African citizens, while development partners have reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the region's evolving development strategies (EAC 2024b).

The EAC is not an isolated entity pursuing unilateral ambitions; rather, it is an intergovernmental organisation mandated to promote the collective interests of its people. The objectives and areas of cooperation outlined in the Treaty require sustained financial resources, which may not always be readily available from partner states alone. Articles 130(3) and 130(4) of the EAC Treaty expressly provide for cooperation with development partners and other external actors in mobilising resources necessary for the attainment of East Africa Community objectives (EAC 1999: arts 130[3–4]). In practice, however, questions relating to financing models and burden-sharing have occasionally generated tensions among partner states.

The EAC's pursuit of its objectives has, therefore, attracted engagement from international organisations and multinational agencies. The framers of the Treaty recognised that the EAC cannot operate in isolation, but must interact with intergovernmental organisations of which its partner states are members. Institutions such as the UN and the AU have supported regional integration efforts and aligned action plans with broader continental and global development frameworks (Japan's International Cooperation Agency [JICA] 2018).

## Germany's (GIZ) partnership with the EAC

Germany, through the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ), is one of the key development partners supporting the EAC. Development cooperation is operationalised through institutional frameworks, and GIZ's presence within the EAC architecture reflects the German government's commitment to advancing the objectives of the EAC (EAC-GIZ 2024a).

The motivation underpinning this partnership is captured in the phrase "integration is about people", a statement emphasised in engagements between the EAC secretariat and GIZ (Mathuki 2021). This perspective underscores the people-centred approach adopted in the design and implementation of GIZ-supported programmes, which aim to strengthen regional integration, institutional capacity, and sustainable development within the EAC.

The ultimate objective of GIZ is to promote a market-driven and people-centred EAC that benefits all citizens of the East African region. Acting on behalf of the German government, GIZ supports the EAC secretariat and partner states in advancing the regional integration process (EAC-GIZ 2024a). It works in close collaboration with private sector actors, civil society organisations and academic institutions to strengthen institutional capacity and regional competitiveness.

GIZ further supports value addition across industries within the region, enhancing the quality of products and services as part of its broader partnership objectives with the EAC (EAC-GIZ 2024a). This approach aligns with the integration objectives set out under Article 2(2) of the EAC Treaty, which emphasises the establishment of a Customs Union, Common Market, Monetary Union, and ultimately a Political Federation (EAC 1999: art [2]).

The partnership between Germany and the EAC has endured for over 26 years, dating back to 1998, during which numerous projects have been successfully implemented while others remain ongoing (EAC-GIZ 2024b). GIZ has provided significant support to the implementation of the Customs Union and the Common Market, two of the four pillars of EAC integration (EAC 1999: art 2[2]).

In practical terms, GIZ supports EAC integration across multiple thematic sectors, including agriculture and food security; customs and trade; education, science and technology; gender; community development and civil society; health; peace and security; tourism and wildlife; industrialisation and SME development and investment promotion and private sector development (GIZ 2024b).

## *Germany's (GIZ) implemented projects in the EAC*

In furtherance of its mandate in the EAC, the German government through GIZ, cooperated with the EAC in pandemic preparedness. This forms part of the key sectors that define the GIZ–EAC partnership. Though the EAC was not badly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, GIZ was at the forefront of every resilient action.

GIZ also assists the EAC in fighting other infectious diseases such as Ebola, cholera and malaria. The GIZ response team has been key in running several projects to assist the community in pandemic preparedness in the region. The project played the role of advising the secretariat on the sustainable integration of "One Health" that created resilience and also had responsibility for pandemic outbreaks. The assistance has been key in providing technical expertise in the health sector in the EAC. The goal was to enable the EAC partner states to overcome infectious diseases and work closely with stakeholders in the partner states, playing a pivotal role in capacity building of workers in the health sector. Though the community partner states had different approaches towards COVID-19, GIZ took responsibility for all.

The EAC opens its doors for assistance in maintenance of peace and security, conscious that without realising peace the EAC objectives cannot be achieved timely (EAC 1999). The EAC secretariat in the past decades faced a problem of weak institutional structures and the lack of a peace and security directorate together with inadequate implementation of regional strategies in the partner states.

To this effect, GIZ was a key player in the promotion of peace and security in the EAC (GIZ 2024b). From 2009–2010, GIZ ran a cross-border project, Promotion of Peace and Security in the EAC, which involved joint efforts in the Republics of Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania (GIZ 2024b).

The peace operations, though never survived the test of time, were instrumental in peace building. It supported projects on peace and security which fostered collaboration amongst the Partner States of the Community, supported the EAC Directorate for Peace and Security, and helped in control of light weapons in the Community (GIZ 2024b).

## United States participation in EAC affairs

The United States (USA) is among the development partners of the EAC through support, expertise and foreign direct investment. The USA, besides being a development partner of the EAC, also supports individual states through its institutions like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), African Growth and Opportunity Act 2000 (AGOA) and other development arrangements (United States Government 2022).

The USA entered a partnership with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) under the Integrated Country Strategy (United States Government 2022). The partnership promised four mission goals including the promotion of stability and durable peace, strengthening the rule of law, preserving the Congo Basin rainforest and supporting and strengthening democracy (United States Government 2022). The mission to promote peace and security in Eastern Congo came as an effort to create firstly, peace throughout the region and secondly, to guard the interests of the USA in Eastern DRC, including citizens and property. In addition, there was a need to build a democratic DRC free from corruption and mismanagement of resources while involving the citizens of the DRC in the development of the state (United States Government 2022). The call from President Félix Tshisekedi comes at the right time when the country's defence forces are overpowered by hundreds of fighting forces in different regions of the country.

The question of whether the partnership with the USA is a solution to the Congolese problem is still in doubt, since many actors and partners like the UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), France and Joint African forces have for the last twenty years worked jointly. However, this relationship cannot be gauged solely on past failed missions, given that it is a new government that brought a peaceful transition of power in the country.

The DRC had for the past decades witnessed bloody and chaotic transitions of power, and the 2023 presidential elections to a certain extent, reflect the success of the USA–DRC partnership. The Americas continue to influence the Congolese political space through privileged

partnerships for peace, prosperity, and prevention of the environment (PP4PP+P). This is done through funding to lift the lives of the people in the DRC.

The partnership, however, may be bait for the Americas to protect their interests in the DRC. Some sources have aired that the USA has always capitalised on the protection of its people and property while advancing state interests (BBC 2013). It is wise to say that many development partners on the African continent are striving to secure their interests in dependent countries and how they can use them to their advantage. This is evident from the BBC report that the DRC has been destabilised by big powers interested in reaping its natural resources (BBC 2013).

## *Through USAID*

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has, for decades, served as a major channel of development assistance to African, Asian and South American states. Within Africa, and specifically in relation to the EAC, the USA has concluded several bilateral agreements with individual partner states. The objectives of these agreements vary from state to state, though they are generally aimed at advancing development. The objectives address issues such as poverty eradication, health, education, research, good governance and agriculture (USAID/Kenya and East Africa 2016).

At the regional level, the USA has operated through the Regional Development Cooperation Strategy. This cooperation does not replace bilateral engagements with individual partner states, but aligns with the broader agenda of the EAC. USAID pursues three principal objectives in its engagement with the region: integration; prosperity and resilience (USAID/Kenya and East Africa 2016).

The EAC recognises that full economic, social and political integration requires addressing structural vulnerabilities, including poverty and food insecurity. USAID, in collaboration with regional institutions, has supported efforts aimed at transforming livelihood systems in affected areas (USAID/Kenya and East Africa 2016).

This cooperation also extends to the health sector, where EAC

partner states continue to face infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. USAID works with regional and international partners to strengthen health systems and enhance resilience across the EAC (USAID/Kenya and East Africa 2016).

## Through the AGOA

The USA also extends support to African states through the AGOA. The AGOA targets eligible sub-Saharan African countries and provides economic support aimed at stimulating growth in poverty-stricken regions, as it is reflected in the preamble (African Growth and Opportunity Act [AGOA] 2000). The EAC falls within the sub-Saharan region covered by the Act.

Eligibility under AGOA is not automatic, but depends on compliance with criteria set out in the Act. These include the establishment of a market-based economy, adherence to the rule of law, political pluralism, elimination of trade barriers to USA investment, implementation of policies to reduce poverty and respect for internationally recognised human rights (AGOA 2000).

The Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community reflects similar principles. Article 6(d) of the Treaty recognises adherence to the rule of law, good governance and the protection of human rights, while the integration framework promotes a market-oriented regional economy (EAC 1999: art 6[d]).

AGOA grants eligible sub-Saharan African states duty-free access to the USA market (AGOA 2000). Most EAC partner states benefit from AGOA, with the exception of certain states, including the DRC and the Republic of Burundi (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020).

The Act creates opportunities for eligible states to export goods to the USA duty-free, thereby promoting employment, industrial development and expanded markets for raw materials (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020). It also establishes a high-level dialogue mechanism between the USA and sub-Saharan African states to strengthen trade relations and address emerging challenges (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020).

The USA has further supported the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), an initiative that integrates all African REC, including the EAC (Preamble to the Agreement Establishing the AfCFTA). AfCFTA seeks to establish a continent-wide tariff-free zone through the progressive elimination of internal tariffs and harmonisation of external trade policies. The USA has signed cooperation arrangements with the AU to support the implementation of AfCFTA (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020).

In addition to regional arrangements, several EAC partner states maintain bilateral trade agreements with the USA. For example, in 2020, the Republic of Kenya engaged in bilateral negotiations aimed at deepening trade and investment relations with the USA (Biennial Report on the Implementation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act 2020). The Republic of Rwanda similarly maintains a trade relationship under the USA–Rwanda Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), which strengthens commercial engagement between the two states (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020).

It may, therefore, be observed that alongside China, the USA remains a significant development partner and trade ally for African states. However, while acknowledging the positive contributions of these arrangements, it is equally necessary to examine the limitations and strategic interests that may underlie such partnerships. These issues will be analysed in the subsequent sections of this study to assess the balance of interests involved.

## China and the EAC

### *Economic and infrastructural development*

The pursuit of a fully integrated East Africa necessitates the involvement of multiple actors in order to realise the EAC's objectives. The EAC was recognised by the African Development Bank in 2014 as possessing some of the most advanced regional integration goals on the continent (African Development Bank 2014). The establishment of the customs union and the implementation of the common market protocol mark significant milestones in the integration process. The EAC's development agenda

is further embedded in the Vision 2050 framework and aligns with the six-stage integration process envisaged under Article 6 of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (1991).

The Common Market Protocol provides for two key rights—the right of establishment and the right of residence—and five fundamental freedoms: the free movement of goods; persons; labour; services and capital (East African Community 2009 art. 2[4][a–g]). The effective realisation of these freedoms, particularly the free movement of goods and capital, requires well-developed and coordinated infrastructure.

Among its development strategies, the EAC has prioritised ten international road transport corridors under the East African Road Network (EAC Development Strategy 2016–2018). These include the Northern Corridor, Central Corridor, Siari Corridor, Mtwara Corridor and Arusha Corridor. The Community's master plan towards Vision 2050 emphasises the development of a comprehensive road network by 2030 as a means of enhancing intra-regional trade (EAC Development Strategy 2016–2018).

Unlike other development partners, China's engagement within the EAC has primarily focussed on infrastructure development and trade liberalisation, both within the EAC and across Africa more broadly (Ngwenya and Lema n.d.). Prior to increased Chinese engagement, Africa faced structural challenges in establishing a coherent and effective infrastructure development model (African Development Bank 2014). China has assumed an active role in infrastructural development within the EAC, largely through its state-linked construction companies. Evidence indicates that all EAC partner states have engaged Chinese construction companies in major infrastructure projects (Ngwenya and Lema n.d.). Chinese expertise has contributed to new architectural designs and modern road construction techniques within the region. In 2019, the Chinese government reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the EAC by donating twelve vehicles valued at approximately US$ 400 000.00 to enhance capacity-building programmes within the EAC (East African Community 2019).

The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represent a significant dimension of China's engagement in infrastructure and trade development

within the EAC. The BRI aims to connect markets across Asia, Africa, South America and parts of Europe, thereby enhancing global economic cooperation (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership 2022). The initiative is framed as an inclusive model of international economic, social, and political cooperation.

Within the EAC, the BRI seeks to reduce poverty and open new urban and economic spaces through infrastructural expansion. Infrastructure development is closely linked to industrialisation, reduced transport costs and the facilitation of inter-regional trade. The BRI aligns with the AU's Agenda 2063, which envisions a fully integrated continent (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership 2022.

China remains a leading financier and contractor in infrastructure development within the EAC. This engagement was further consolidated through the Beijing Framework Agreement between the EAC and China, which aimed to enhance trade and investment cooperation (Aspen Institute 2011). The agreement extended beyond infrastructure to promote broader EAC–China investment cooperation. It included commitments to build the capacity of EAC employees through training and human resource development. The establishment of the EAC–China Joint Committee on Trade (JCET) further strengthened economic cooperation between the parties (Aspen Institute 2011).

By 2011, EAC–China bilateral trade had reportedly grown by 39 per cent, reflecting the expansion of economic relations (Aspen Institute 2011). The cooperation framework envisaged expanded opportunities in trade, infrastructure, power generation, employment creation and industrial development.

## Energy

In addition to transport and trade, EAC–China relations extend significantly into the energy sector. Several major energy generation projects within the EAC have been undertaken by Chinese companies. These include the Karuma Hydropower Dam valued at approximately US$ 1.7 billion (completed), the Lake Turkana Wind Power Project (valued at approximately US$ 858 million), the Loiyangalani–Suswa 400 Kilovolt

Transmission Line Project, and a Chinese-supported hydroelectric dam project in Burundi.

The development of the power sector plays a critical role in supporting industrialisation, urban growth and overall economic expansion within the EAC. Reliable energy infrastructure underpins manufacturing, trade and investment, thereby, reinforcing the broader integration objectives of the EAC.

## Japan-EAC relations

Japan, like other developed economies, has maintained engagement with Africa since 1993 through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). Through this forum, discussions are held between Japan and African states on strategies for building a sustainable and resilient African economy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2013). Japan's efforts to support Africa's economic revival emphasise infrastructure development and human resource development as key pillars of assistance.

In the area of peace and security, Japan has played a proactive role in various regions of Africa, including the Sahel/North Africa region and South Sudan. Japanese government programmes have focussed on peace consolidation and the reduction of terrorist activities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2013). In Somalia, Japanese restoration initiatives contributed to the establishment of a new government and constitution in 2012. Somalia, now a partner state of the EAC, presents prospects for enhanced stability within the region.

Available evidence indicates that among EAC partner states, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania are significant beneficiaries of Japanese aid in Africa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2013). Tanzania and Uganda have benefited from Japanese automobile support, while Japanese construction companies have played a notable role in road development in Kenya. The construction of roads in Kenya has implications beyond national development, as it facilitates connectivity and trade for landlocked partner states such as Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.

Japanese assistance to the EAC is largely channelled through the Japan

International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which operates both at the level of individual partner states and at the regional level. Within the EAC, Kenya is regarded as Japan's largest partner in terms of the scale of cooperation (JICA 2018).

The areas of cooperation include environmental protection, industrial development, agricultural and rural development, universal health coverage and infrastructure development (JICA 2018). Kenya, being one of the more economically advanced partner states within the EAC, plays a pivotal role in regional integration. Consequently, Japan's engagement in Kenya serves as a strategic foundation for broader regional development within the EAC.

## Progress towards the AfCFTA: Can Africa get it right?

### *Agenda 2063 and the EAC*

Agenda 2063, adopted by the AU in 2015, represents a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of Africa over a 50-year period. This blueprint aims to accelerate implementation of continental initiatives for growth and sustainable development. Rooted in Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance, it seeks to foster unity, self-determination, progress and collective prosperity.

The agenda encompasses seven aspirations reflecting Africa's desire for shared prosperity, unity and integration, freedom for citizens, expanded opportunities for women and youth and the full utilisation of the continent's resources and capacities (African Union 2015). These aspirations are further broken down into twenty goals and 39 priority areas, providing a comprehensive roadmap for African development.

Implementation occurs through ten-year plans, allowing periodic adaptation to changing continental and global dynamics. The First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2014–2023) focussed on flagship projects such as AfCFTA, the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) and the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons.

For the EAC, Agenda 2063 aligns with Vision 2050, aiming for a

fully integrated regional bloc with functional infrastructure, political integration and full implementation of the customs and common market protocols. The agenda emphasises inclusivity, sustainability and innovation, prioritising women and youth empowerment, gender parity, and the elimination of violence against women and girls (African Union [AU] 2015). Environmental sustainability is also integrated, with climate resilience and natural resource management as core objectives.

Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) are critical enablers. The Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024) align with Agenda 2063, addressing areas such as food security, disease prevention and communications. The AU has established monitoring tools including the Africa Agenda 2063 Results Framework and Dashboard. Nonetheless, limited resources, capacity constraints and external shocks like COVID-19 necessitate adaptive strategies.

## *Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA*

AfCFTA is a flagship initiative under Agenda 2063, aimed at boosting intra-African trade, enhancing connectivity, and facilitating the free movement of people and goods across the continent. It represents a transformative opportunity to reposition Africa as an active global player rather than a passive recipient of external interventions.

Agenda 2063 provides a clear framework against which AfCFTA can be implemented and evaluated. Partnerships and agreements with external actors should be aligned with Africa's long-term development objectives, ensuring collective action strengthens the continent's bargaining power in global negotiations.

AfCFTA's implementation seeks to reduce trade barriers, stimulate industrialisation and enhance regional value chains. The agreement emphasises domestic resource mobilisation and the alignment of external partnerships with African priorities. Properly executed, AfCFTA can strengthen intra-African economic integration, foster industrial diversification and accelerate progress toward Agenda 2063's overarching goal of a self-reliant and prosperous Africa.

## Drips of relief: What is there for the EAC?

Post-independence Africa faced a fundamental question: whether to merely survive the legacy left by colonialism or to adopt new strategic pathways for development. The colonial legacy of integration survived through Pan-African economic and political mergers, which could only be realised through the creation of RECs serving as building blocks for continental unification (African Development Bank 2014).

New opportunities for regional cooperation and integration have emerged with greater access to capital markets by African states and REC. International financing has become a significant component of this discourse. While some African states pursue engagement with major powers individually, scholarship suggests that collective engagement through regional blocs enhances bargaining power and strengthens access to external financing (African Development Bank 2014).

External powers have contributed to regional integration efforts in the EAC and across Africa over the past decades. Historically, Africa was characterised by fragmented markets, small populations, vast geographical distances and limited connectivity. The idea of integration in the Great Lakes region can be traced back to British colonial administration, which established a customs union among the Republic of Uganda, the Republic of Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania.

Infrastructural development has remained a major contribution of development partners to the EAC. Among the objectives of the EAC is the attainment of economic development, which requires efficient infrastructure linking different parts of the region. China, through the BRI, has played a central role in infrastructure development aimed at strengthening economic growth within the EAC (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership 2022).

### *Open market for African goods*

Scholarly analysis and statistical evidence indicate that EAC partner states benefit from participation in the global economy through trade in goods and services (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2022).

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) framework provides eligible African states with preferential access to the United States market, enabling the export of raw materials and finished goods ( Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020). Access to foreign markets allows East African states to sell products competitively while reducing oversupply in domestic markets. Participation in global production chains further enhances industrial output and market diversification.

### *Investment*

Development partners have significantly increased inward investment in the EAC, spanning infrastructure, industry, education and health sectors. In 2018 alone, the USA invested over US$ 34 billion in sub-Saharan Africa, strengthening economic development across the region (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020).

The EAC, like much of Africa, faces unemployment challenges driven by limited technological advancement and innovation gaps among youth populations. German development cooperation through GIZ has contributed to strengthening technological capacity in the EAC, thereby enhancing socio-economic development and international competitiveness (GIZ 2024b).

A digitalised economy supported by skilled labour is essential for sustainable development within the EAC. Initiatives such as academic exchange programmes coordinated through the Inter-University Council for East Africa, in partnership with institutions including the University of Dar es Salaam, Mannheim University of Applied Sciences and the German Aerospace Centre, aim to strengthen regional academic and technical capacity (JICA 2018).

### *Sponsoring bulky projects that would otherwise be expensive for the community to handle*

Development partners have also financed large-scale projects that would otherwise exceed the financial capacity of the EAC. China, through the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation and the BRI, has supported major

infrastructure projects linking the EAC to global markets (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership 2022). These projects contribute to trade expansion and support broader continental objectives, including the AfCFTA.

Beyond road construction, development partners have supported energy generation projects within the region. Chinese and United Kingdom-backed initiatives have contributed to the development of major hydropower plants in East Africa, strengthening rural electrification and industrial growth.

Development partner engagement has also generated employment opportunities, thereby contributing to poverty reduction and increased government revenue through taxation. Infrastructure initiatives such as the BRI projects have created jobs across Kenya, Somalia and other parts of Africa, reinforcing the developmental link between large-scale infrastructure and economic participation.

## *Pandemic preparedness*

With limited advancement in science and technology, the outbreak of COVID-19 and other pandemics posed significant threats to the EAC. This created an urgent need for expertise, capacity building and the equipping of health centres with modern equipment commensurate with pandemic response demands. Development partners responded to this call and played a critical role in strengthening the medical sector.

The German development agency GIZ was instrumental in providing technical expertise, capacity building, and equipment to enhance pandemic preparedness within the EAC (GIZ n.d.).

GIZ has also supported healthcare innovation within the EAC through technological advancement and research development. For example, it supported the Uganda Infectious Disease Institute in strengthening research capacity and developing mobile health applications aimed at improving access to and delivery of home-based healthcare services (GIZ 2024b).

## Peace and security

Several attempts have been made by the East African Partner States to address security challenges in the region. In recent years, particular areas of concern have included the Eastern DRC, Burundi and South Sudan. Regional responses have included the adoption of the EAC Strategy on Regional Peace and Security and the establishment of mechanisms under Chapter 23 relating to peace and security, including early warning systems (East African Community 2018; East African Community 2013).

The attainment of long-lasting peace has, however, required the involvement of additional actors, as envisaged under Article 131 of the Treaty for the Establishment of the EAC (EAC 1999). Furthermore, Article 11 of the EAC Protocol on Foreign Policy Coordination underscores the importance of coordinated external engagement in matters of peace and security (EAC 2000).

Like the rest of Africa, the EAC's security and defence cooperation with global powers has become increasingly complex and multifaceted. The AU's 2015 Peace and Security Report emphasises peace and security as prerequisites for development and calls for strengthened strategic partnerships (AU 2015).

Cross-regional cooperation has also been pursued. Under the auspices of the AU, the EAC, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) convened a Quadripartite Summit on Peace and Security (African Unity 2023). The Summit commended peace dialogue efforts between the Heads of State of Rwanda and the DRC and called for the implementation of coordinated frameworks under the AU Peace and Security Council (African Unity 2023).

Peace and security concerns have attracted increased foreign involvement in the affairs of the EAC. Development partners have engaged in various initiatives aimed at restoring stability. For instance, the USA–DRC agreement on peace restoration in Eastern DRC sought to promote stability and contributed to facilitating a peaceful electoral process in the country (Kaguta 2024).

Although multiple foreign actors provide assistance, the European Union (EU) remains the principal development partner formally engaged with the EAC on peace and security matters. In 2022, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to working with the EAC to combat terrorism and transnational crime, recognising that free movement of persons and regional integration require a stable and peaceful environment (European Union [EU] 2022). EU support includes funding regional cross-border security initiatives through the European Development Fund (European Union [EU] 2022).

Despite these efforts, uncertainties remain regarding continued civil unrest and insecurity within the region. Some scholars argue that external involvement may exacerbate instability, citing claims that a significant proportion of 70 per cent of the 102 fighting groups operating in the DRC receive foreign backing (interview with Dadius Kaguta 2024). Hence, concerns persist that external actors may simultaneously contribute to and seek to manage insecurity within the region in pursuit of strategic interests.

## Development partner's bullying: Navigating the EAC's dilemma of dependency and diplomacy

Though African development has been majorly affected by external markets, there are unexplored potentials on the African continent that require action from African states. For the past decades, the African economy has faced stagnation, because Africa has always been sidelined in its development and left foreigners to take a lead in its home affairs (African Development Bank 2014). This affected intra-regional investments and prioritised investments outside the continent (African Development Bank 2014).

Evidence on paper and statistics show that on the African continent, South Africa has the best performance regarding intra-continental investment. Does this imply that other African states have not been quick to this pending opportunity? The reaction to this position sees African states as receivers whose markets are incompetent to feed markets outside their borders (African Development Bank 2014).

## When aid becomes a trap for political ambitions

The role of the development partners in the development and affairs of the EAC is seemingly the best of its kind. It revives the spirit of development while carrying burdens that would otherwise fall on the shoulders of the EAC secretariat (think tank of the EAC). Although the partnership is welcomed with a charming environment, its results in the political space often prove unforgiving. These historical flaws, whereby the West and China exploited Africa's territorial and political divisions for their own benefit, continue to shape the political dynamics of contemporary development partnerships. In practice, development partners have sometimes prioritised turning African states into political allies rather than focussing on their primary role—development.

The rivalry has been revealed with China's active role in the development of African states, leaving the West and Americas cautious of their fidelity with the African countries (Bachmann 2013). The battlefield is open to the three rivals, pressing the Africans in the centre stage of the battlefield that does not seem to end any time soon, but rather a resurrection of the past (Bachmann 2013). China's participation has caused resentment among the Europeans and Americas, viewing it as a new colonial agent in Africa (Toghyani and Arabahmadi 2020).

Scholarship shows that initially the USA was never interested in Africa's affairs, and Africa played little-to-no-role in USA foreign policy. From a scholarly lens, one may be inquisitive about what triggers the Americas to take interest in Africa and its affairs. While there have been speculations from different spectators, China's presence in the EAC poses a threat to the USA, with the latter seeking to maintain its position in international politics (Toghyani and Arabahmadi 2020).

The mega projects that China, as a development partner, has set in Africa (East Africa), mentioning the BRI and open trade relations with Africa, become a reflection of China's continued presence in the region, a deal that faces controversy from the rivals (USA) (Babic 2019). Albeit, this depicts the intention of the great power in East Africa to be politically dominant and not otherwise. The China-USA tensions may just be a sample of what might be happening between other powers present in the EAC (Babic 2019).

These geopolitical rivalries also intersect with regional security concerns. Over the past decades, the DRC, Burundi, Rwanda and Southern Sudan have all been the centre of conflicts influenced or supported by foreign powers. East African development partners have been directly involved in addressing these security challenges, while also seeking to ensure the stability and integrity of the region.

This issue becomes particularly controversial when considered alongside the speech of the President of the Republic of Uganda. In his address, the president outlined that the integration of the EAC is based on three main pillars: first, security; second, independence and third, working together (Museveni 2024). It is evident that the involvement of foreign powers in the region's security may undermine these objectives and potentially disadvantage the Community (Museveni 2024).

## Crippling the EAC-based institutions

East Africa, like other regional blocs, has several institutions that accelerate the developmental programmes of the EAC. Some of these institutions are part of the organs of the EAC, while others have observer status or are based in the partner states of the EAC. Development partner institutions may compete with domestic institutions, often leaving the latter out-competed. This dynamic undermines the EAC's autonomous powers to determine what is best for itself.

The current trend of development in Africa has seen several states devising new strategies to boost domestic trade. This includes trade liberalisation, economic reforms and democratic governance. So far, the efforts by African states have yielded tangible progress, with some early signs of success, signalling a new trend in Africa's development that is increasingly free from foreign control (Kife et al. 1997). However, despite these efforts, progress is at risk of stagnation due to the uncontrolled involvement of foreign players. Foreign companies and development partners have flooded African markets with imported products, leaving limited room for African states to determine their own developmental priorities (Kifeet al. 1997).

The long presence of these institutions in East Africa poses a serious

challenge to the independence of African states, particularly because many of these institutions were initially established by powers that had engineered colonial domination decades earlier. The continued involvement of former colonial powers in the region can be understood as a form of indirect control, aimed at protecting and maintaining their strategic and economic interests.

In this context, the role of these actors as development partners is not purely philanthropic; rather, it can be interpreted as a way to retain influence and reclaim access to resources that were historically extracted from the continent. This dynamic underscores a broader pattern in which the legacies of colonialism continue to shape development interventions, often limiting the autonomy of African states in determining their own priorities and strategies.

It is a clear case that the current development partners in Africa are chasing their economic interests as compared to developing Africa as they claim. The USA maintains a strong trade hold with African countries through AGOA. However, despite efforts to promote economic growth and reduce poverty in Africa, USA policies often prioritise the country's own interests, as reflected in the eligibility criteria of the AGOA, which exclude the poorest East African states from benefiting

The poorest states in the EAC are not beneficiaries of the AGOA, a fact which makes the initiative selective and not fully committed to its objectives of eradicating poverty in the community (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2020).

## Exploitation of African resources

Foreign states that come as development partners in Africa are seen as predators who devour their prey in daylight. The export of raw materials from African countries has been a major exchange between the development partners and the beneficiaries. For the USA, for an African state to be a beneficiary of its AGOA Aid, it must be willing to open its fields to the Americas to collect raw materials (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2000).

The aspiring state, in addition, should be in a position to eliminate

trade barriers for USA goods. This leaves questions as to who gains more from the partnership, the answers of which are obvious: the development partners are more focussed on what they gain than what is offered (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2000).

African states lose control of their economy by compromising the rules promoting their domestic economies while trying to please foreign powers. The USA, through the African Growth Initiative, demands that as part of the eligibility, an aspiring state should allow products of the USA to their domestic market and eliminate any trade barriers that would otherwise be denied access.

## Back-dropping community goals

The accomplishments engineered by the development partners are incompatible with the community's long-term goals as outlined in Vision 2050. The Vision stands as an architecture for the future of the EAC in social and economic development (EAC 2016). The architectural makeup depicts what the EAC will be over time and a view of what it wants to be known for. The framers of Vision 2050 divide the same into four chapters, with chapter five expounding on the pillars of the community.

The community aspires to have a sustainable use of the environment and natural resources. However, the uncontrolled shipping of raw materials for the production demands somewhere in Europe and the Americas negates any efforts by the community to achieve this goal (EAC 2016). The unforgiving agreements between the African states and the development partners state the provision of raw materials as an eligibility pass for aid to Africa (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2000).

## Exposing African security systems to external threat

Peace and security are some of the key factors for development in society. The African continent has been widely affected by conflicts which have led to the death of millions and displacement of people from their homes (African Centre for Strategic Studies 2022). The players in peace

and security on the continent include the AU, United Nations Security Council, and various stakeholders who have found it wanting to fight insecurity on the continent (African Centre for Strategic Studies 2022). The AU further delegates its mandate to the REC and urges them to establish early warning systems to spot the grey areas prone to conflicts (African Centre for Strategic Studies 2022).

The African society has recently invited external actors to take part in the security of the region. The Americans have been partial to the overall security system in Africa, taking part in policy design and active participation in security projects. Though their role is highly positive in the security sector, there is fear that the security system has been exposed to external actors. The situation in the DRC is ascribed to external support which destabilises the region to reap a free meal.

## Investment agreements between Africa and foreign investors: The missing balance of interests?

### *Trade agreements*

This part of the study discusses the investment agreements entered between African states and the big powers. While analysing this, the writer weighs the interests of African states against the foreign big powers (foreign investors). Available evidence is used to comment on whether African interests are considered while concluding these agreements. Though there are several trade agreements between Africa and the big powers, this part selects agreements signed by African states with the United Kingdom (UK) and China as case studies.

Economic transformation is at the centre of the EAC, and Africa in general was conscious that without economic development social and human development is difficult. Africa, for years, has been fond of relying on a natural resource-based economy and there springs up a need to transform to an industrial-based economy on the continent. This campaign is not a one-man dock, but rather the expansion of markets within and outside the continent.

The varying trade tariffs in different parts of Africa make the exercise

even more draining and time-consuming. This trajectory, however, is expected to accelerate through the AfCFTA to eliminate any trade barriers. The elimination of trade barriers will imply that Africa can now trade freely within, while applying common tariffs to foreigners. Further, it will create conditions sufficient to attract more investment on the continent. However, before moving heads up to boosting the investment opportunities it is even more appealing to understand the nature of agreements that Africa signs with the big nations.

## UK-Africa

The UK is on the list of states that have invested in several African states and concluded several Bilateral Investment Treaties (BIT) with Africa (Mendez-Parra et al. 2020). This may be linked to its long-term attachment to the continent through colonial works or modern imperialism. The UK indisputably through its companies plays a great role in liberalising the African economy and widening the market for the finished goods (Mendez-Parra et al. 2020: 11). the UK is among the leading investors in electronics and other modern appliances.

The UK invests in Africa through the Commonwealth Development Corporation which supports commercial investment in the region (Mendez- Parra et al. 2020). The target areas for investment are the energy sector and agro-processing firms (Mendez- Parra et al. 2020). In addition, the UK Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) also penetrates areas of quarrying and mining by 51 per cent of the total UK FDI in Africa (Mendez-Parra et al. 2020).

Investment at the international level is governed by international law and BITs signed between the foreign investors and host states. This assures security to the property of foreign investors, avoids double taxation, and states the forum for resolving disputes (Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania for the Promotion and Protection of Investments 1994 Art. 9). While BITs are essential in investor-state relations, most BITs signed between the UK and the African states represent a colonial existence in Africa (Mendez-Parra et al. 2020). There is enough evidence

to prove that most of these agreements did not change even after the end of colonial rule in Africa.

As a former colonial master in Africa, the UK has the largest bilateral investment agreements with the African states. This leaves a mixed understanding as to whether African states participated in the conclusion of agreements that themselves still represent colonial oppression of Africa. While some agreements of this nature were terminated, that is to say Sierra Leone terminated its Agreement in 2001 (Mendez-Parra et al. 2020), other agreements are still in force.

## China-Africa

Africa has been important for China since the late 1950s, when Chinese diplomacy began to emerge, in the aftermath of the Korean War, from the shadow of the Soviet Union (Taylor 2009). During the early period of Sino-African interaction, China was ideologically motivated and provided support for national liberation movements and African states. By the mid-1970s, China had a greater number of aid projects in Africa than the USA (Taylor 2009).

African countries have also signed trade and investment agreements with China to catalyse economic development between the two sides. The Chinese-Africa Investment Cooperation (FOCAC) looks at facilitating investment negotiations between China and the African side (Ofodile 2013: 157). The BITs between China and Africa are also important in protecting labour rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development (Ofodile 2013).

However, the FOCAC documents are more lined with amplifying the interests of China as a capital exporter (Ofodile 2013). The documents outline the importance of China in capital exportation to Africa, paying little attention to African needs (Ofodile 2013). Some scholars state that China contributes to climate change on the African continent through importation of low-tech machines with high emissions (Ofodile 2013).

The BITs signed between China and some African states are ambiguous in substance (Ofodile 2013). That is to say they represent three forms of BITs including retrospective BITs, those which can apply

to circumstances after the entry into force, and those that specify the time for application (Ofodile 2013). Those that are retrospective in nature are selectively applied leaving out some events that might have occurred before it entered into force (Ofodile 2013). The BITs among other factors are concluded between the parties to assist in resolving disputes that arise in the course of business (UNCTAD 2004).

BITs steer development between the agreed parties. However, one challenge that comes with China-Africa BITs is that they do not mention the level of development between China and the African states (Ofodile 2013). In addition, the China-Africa BITs say nothing about development, either in preambles or substance which makes development a last priority after the repatriation of profits (Ofodile 2013).

While BITs may be acclaimed for accelerating FDI, statistical information is not in favour of the African underdogs (Ofodile 2013). In East Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania recently adjusted its arbitration laws on dispute resolution. The call for such changes came as a result of Tanzania's failure in arbitration cases with its foreign counterparts. Tanzania demanded amendments to the Natural Wealth Resources (Permanent Sovereignty Act) (Natural Wealth Resources [Permanent Sovereignty Act]: Preamble). The gist of the amended section requires that all disputes involving natural resources be adjudicated in Tanzania using Tanzania laws (Natural Wealth and Resources [Permanent Sovereignty] Act 2017 Preamble & Section 11).

## Theorising African agency: Concepts, contexts and contention

The agency level in African international relations represents the capacity for African actors to exert influence and make autonomous decisions in their interactions with global powers. This concept is rooted in the idea that African states and institutions can shape their destinies and are not merely passive recipients of external policies (Landsberg 2018). African agency manifests in various forms, including diplomatic negotiations, economic partnerships and cultural exchanges. The AU's Agenda 2063 serves as a prime example of collective agency, outlining a vision for 'an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and

representing a dynamic force in the global arena' (African Union 2015: 2). This framework provides a foundation for African states to align their national interests with continental aspirations, potentially strengthening their position in global affairs.

## Africa's role in a multipolar world: Positioning, potential and power dynamics

RECs in Africa have increasingly sought to align their strategic goals with their engagements with global powers, recognising the potential for mutually beneficial partnerships. The EAC, for instance, has prioritised infrastructure development and regional integration in its Vision 2050 (EAC 2016). This focus aligns closely with China's BRI, resulting in significant Chinese investment in East African infrastructure projects (Chatzky and McBride 2020). However, this alignment has also raised concerns about debt sustainability and economic dependence. Scholarship highlights the complex interplay between African development goals and Chinese geopolitical interests (Chatzky and McBride 2020), emphasising the need for RECs to maintain agency in these engagements. The EAC's experience underscores the importance of strategic alignment with global powers while safeguarding regional interests.

The regional initiatives have placed a strong emphasis on security and counterterrorism in its strategic plans, aligning with the interests of Western powers, particularly France and the USA (SADC 2013). The regional Counterterrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan, adopted in 2013, has attracted significant support from these global powers. This alignment has resulted in increased military cooperation, intelligence sharing and capacity building initiatives. However, critics argue that this focus on security has sometimes come at the expense of other developmental priorities. The heavy involvement of external powers in regional security affairs risks undermining regional autonomy in addressing local conflicts. This situation highlights the delicate balance RECs must strike between leveraging global power support and maintaining their agency in regional affairs.

The SADC has adopted a more cautious approach to aligning its goals

with global power engagement. The SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap 2015–2063 emphasises the need for value addition and beneficiation of the region's natural resources (SADC 2013). This goal aligns with the interests of various global powers seeking access to Southern Africa's mineral wealth. The SADC, however, has been more assertive in demanding technology transfer and local content requirements in its engagements with global powers. This approach reflects a growing awareness among SADC member states of the need to maximise developmental benefits from global power engagements. The SADC's strategy demonstrates how RECs can align their goals with global power interests while actively shaping the terms of engagement to suit regional priorities.

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) focussed on trade facilitation and market integration in its strategic plans, aligning closely with the EUs development cooperation priorities (COMESA 2024). The COMESA–EAC–SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area, launched in 2015, has received significant support from the EU through its External Investment Plan (COMESA 2024). This alignment has facilitated increased trade flows and investment between Europe and Eastern and Southern Africa.

However, challenges remain in ensuring that these trade arrangements contribute effectively to regional industrialisation goals. Scholarship highlights the need for COMESA to develop strategies that balance trade liberalisation with the protection of nascent regional industries (COMESA 2024). The COMESA case illustrates how RECs can leverage alignments with global powers to advance regional integration while navigating the complexities of global trade dynamics.

## Africa and big conferences: Is the future of Africa in promising hands?

Africa is termed as the Global South and one of the least developed countries is found in Africa. The fact that Africa fell back in terms of development does not necessarily mean that Africa is isolated internationally. The big powers have an interest in Africa and its resources

and Africa has, on many occasions, been invited to join the big summit where together with other developed countries its interests are brought to the table. Scholarship looks at this form of inclusion as a new form of world diplomacy that has created a new scramble for Africa (Ngwa 2021).

The framework for Africa's partnership with the rest of the world has been defined in three distinct forms (Ngwa 2021). The first form involves continent-to-continent partnership (Africa–Europe, Africa–Asia and Africa–South America), the second involves Africa and individual states, and the third involves Africa–institutional partnership. This involves institutions like the Commonwealth, the Group of 77 (G77) and the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) (Ngwa 2021). The active membership of these three forms of partnership has been defined through attendance and agency to big summits.

Though Africa's partnership is defined in three forms, the new dimension in Africa has taken a new synergy and amplified Africa-state partnership sideling the old riddles of Africa-continent Partnership (Ngwa 2021). This section of the study will analyse the three forms of partnership weighing what is available for Africa and the Africans. This will be done through analysis of the agendas discussed in summits, agency and bargaining power on the side of the Africans.

## Africa-states partnership

### *Russia*

The Russia–Africa Summit represents a contemporary diplomatic model revealing renewed engagement by the Russian Federation with African states. Africa approached the summit with concerns over rising fuel and grain prices following the Russia–Ukraine war. The summit, held in St. Petersburg, generated significant geopolitical speculation (Bilban and Hainzl 2023).

Russia's re-engagement with Africa has centred on security cooperation, energy partnerships and natural resource extraction. The first Russia–Africa Summit in 2019 signalled Moscow's revived strategic

interest in the continent. Russia's approach often involves leveraging military and technical expertise, offering security assistance to states facing internal conflict or terrorism (Council on Foreign Relations 2023).

Several analyses describe the 2023 summit as occurring at a time when Russia faced international isolation following its invasion of Ukraine, having strained relations with Western allies (Bilban and Hainzl 2023). Convening the summit was viewed as a strategic move to demonstrate that Russia retained strong partnerships in the Global South. While Russia sought to reinforce its diplomatic standing in international politics, African states were primarily concerned with stabilising grain and fuel prices amid global supply disruptions (The Kampala G77 and Non-Aligned Movement Summits 2024). The summit also provided an opportunity for African leaders who were politically distanced from Western partners to strengthen ties with Russia and explore alternative partnershipsShifts in geopolitical alignment often reflect survival strategies in international politics, particularly for states facing reduced Western aid (Miholjcic 2020:3).

Whether the summit fully represented African interests remains subject to debate, especially given the broader political tensions affecting both Russia and certain African states. Observers argue that the 2023 Russia–Africa Summit appeared politically advantageous to Russia, rather than reflecting a balanced platform of mutual benefit (Bilban and Hainzl 2023).

Russia's growing political presence in Africa has also exposed African states to geopolitical competition between major powers, particularly between Moscow and Washington (Council on Foreign Relations 2023). The broader political environment illustrates how Africa may become entangled in strategic rivalries. While Western states have supported Ukraine, several African states have maintained relations with Russia, partly influenced by concerns over energy supply security.

## *South-Korea*

South Korea is among the Asian states that have consistently engaged

with the Global South through diplomatic and development initiatives. In 2024, South Korea convened a summit with African states to deliberate on African development priorities (Joint Declaration 2024).

At the summit, both parties acknowledged Africa's agenda of building a sustainable economy through the establishment of a free trade area. It was noted that free trade arrangements have been instrumental in achieving economic development in many industrialised states (Joint Declaration 2024). The Korean side reaffirmed its commitment to implementing relevant UN Security Council resolutions, underscoring its alignment with international governance frameworks (Joint Declaration 2024).

Recognising that Africa has one of the youngest populations globally, education was identified as central to long-term development. The discussions covered 21 agenda points focussing on development, education, solidarity and strengthened cooperation between Korea and African states (Joint Declaration 2024).

South Korea expressed its intention to expand Official Development Assistance (ODA), pledging up to US$ 10 billion by 2032. The Korean government further committed to periodic review and implementation of the summit's undertakings, reflecting a structured and forward-looking partnership approach (Joint Declaration 2024).

## Africa-institution partnership

### *NAM and G77 (Kampala)*

NAM was founded by several third-world countries. The world was surrounded by the rivalry of two great powers, the USA and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and the Global South never aligned with any of the powers. Their first summit (Bandung Conference) was held in 1961 in Italy, and the agenda was to overcome the forces of colonialism and poverty (Miholjcic 2020).

The NAM and G77 have recently been merged to be held at the same time, and recently the summit was held in Kampala, Uganda. The NAM is made up of 120 members, and the G77 has a membership of 134 member

states. Uganda, a host being a partner of the EAC, comes with many opportunities for the region, which has recently been a destination for investors. The agendas in the summit looked at the development of the global south economically, through investment and elimination of trade barriers for their goods to foreign markets (Miholjcic 2020).

The merger of two summits comes with a problem of overlapping membership, and many of these states are at different levels of development. This makes it difficult for states to discuss agendas that suit a common goal. That is to say Burundi with a purchase power parity of US$ 708 in the same summit with the People's Republic of China. NAM, which is currently made up of many countries from the Global South, is not attached to any of the Global powers. It neither falls under the East nor the West, which are the most developed parts of the world. This makes NAM fall under a new category known as non-alignment (Miholjcic 2020).

Another disadvantage of belonging to NAM is that it has no formal institutions, such as a secretariat or constitution. This is challenging on the part of agendas, since they will shift depending on the course of international politics at a time and not states' needs, as the case may be (Miholjcic 2020: 46).

## BRICS

BRICS is one of the internationally recognised summits that stand to boost the development of its member states economically, socially and politically. BRICS is such an important league as far as trade is concerned among its member states and is made up of 42 per cent of the world population and 28 per cent of the global GDP. It represents two types of economy: the developed states of China, Russia, Brazil and India, and then there is South Africa, which is developing (Branco 2015).

BRICS has been acclaimed for the major role played in the world economy and steady fast growth. The South African side has greatly gained from its membership to BRICS, having a vast market to export its goods and economic assistance in case of financial loans and techno-

logical development. While Brazil, Russia and South Africa are global natural resource importers, China is a global importer of natural resources, making the market readily available for all the players (Branco 2015).

BRICS is made up of Russia, Brazil, India, China and South Africa. The last summit of its kind was held in South Africa and was mainly staged on how best sustainable development can be accelerated among member states of the summit. The summit looked at the interests of both the African side (South Africa) and other member states, all promising to defend the interests of all members (Government of South Africa 2023).

The agendas aimed at the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the support for reforms in the UN organisation to make it more democratic, effective, and efficient, support for non-discriminatory rules of the multilateral trading system, progress towards market-oriented agriculture, peace and development, partnership for mutually accelerated growth, and sustainable development (Government of South Africa 2023). In addition, the summit called for institutional development that embraces changes and is abreast with time, while deepening people-to-people exchanges (Branco 2015).

The nature of the agenda discussed in the 2023 summit was mostly general in scope, applying to situations in all member states. However, the fact that South Africa and Brazil export agricultural produce to the BRICS countries, the discussion on the development of agriculture to become market-driven is likely to boost the economy of the two states. Evidence may prove that South Africa is in a league of states where its existence makes the country vulnerable to dumping and flooding of foreign goods more than any of the other four members. With its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as low as 2 per cent of the BRICS GDP, South Africa serves more as a consumer, and its contribution enriches the already developed states. South Africa's consumption by percentage makes up to 70 per cent, making other group members benefit from its presence more than what it gains from the group (Branco 2015).

# Balancing national, regional and continental interests: Charting Africa's path to sustainable development

Africa has been left in arrears whenever states have been called up to negotiate both political and investment agreements. A figure of agreements that African leaders have signed on behalf of their respective countries does not reflect Pan-Africanism. Most of these agreements are backed by corruption and selfishness on the part of the leaders. A good example of these agreements are investment treaties between African states and foreign investors, which simply give the green light to the investors and their investment, while there is little to benefit the host state (Ofodile 2013).

Various scholars have made it clear that the nature of trade agreements between African states and the big powers are contracts of a nature that, if signed between a developed and a developing country, do not yield the desired outcomes. In such agreements, African states gain little due to the technicalities intentionally lined to backslide the underdogs (Ofodile 2013).

Like the rest of the regional arrangements, since independence, Africa has worked on several reforms trying to devise what is best for the continent through policies and agendas. The African continent has set several aspirations and goals whose time frame and completion are expected to be 2063. The aspirations paint a picture of how the African continent would look in 2063, requiring much effort and commitment from the African states, stakeholders and organisations (AU 2015).

Africans wish to see a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development. Inclusive growth demands visionary leaders, and African states stand as key players in the development of the continent based on the ideals of pan-Africanism. However, the continued partnerships with the outside world have increased players in the form of development partners who are less concerned about the aspirations of the African continent (AU 2015).

The aspirations for the creation of a strong, resilient and influential global player and partner requires strong institutions and self-realisation

to achieve such a milestone. The African Statistical Yearbook of 2021 shows that the money supply in Africa is mainly loans from foreign states (African Statistical Yearbook 2021). The statistical information is a sign that Africa has not yet shown signs of self-sustenance, a factor which frustrates the aspirations set in Agenda 2063. If Africa is to achieve its set goals and aspirations, states should learn to build self-reliant economies that will not need much from external borrowing.

## Recommendations

Africa must prioritise the development of science and technology as a strategic tool to reduce dependence on raw material exports and to manage unforeseen crises. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the continent's vulnerability when technological capacity is insufficient, disrupting trade, social services and development programmes. Achieving the aspirations of Agenda 2063 requires that technological advancement be central to national and regional development strategies. Investments in research, innovation and digital infrastructure will enable African states to address crises proactively and assert control over their economic and social destinies.

The EAC should transition from dependency on external actors toward building self-sustaining institutions. Africa's development trajectory must align with the principles of Agenda 2063, emphasising integration, autonomy and the minimisation of external interference. Initiatives such as "One People, One Destiny" and "Africa First" must be operationalised through concrete policies that reinforce African ownership of development plans. Foreign participation should be structured to support, not undermine, the continent's strategic objectives.

Regional security must be African-led and coordinated to reduce reliance on external forces. The EAC, in collaboration with other African entities, should strengthen regional mechanisms capable of addressing transnational threats. Existing initiatives, such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the African Standby Force (ASF), demonstrate the potential for African-led security solutions, however, face challenges including limited

resources, uneven political will and diverging national priorities. A sustainable security framework must safeguard African strategic interests while strategically leveraging external partnerships only where necessary.

Technological development in cybersecurity is a critical component of both national and regional resilience. As African economies and governance systems digitise, the threat landscape expands, making robust cybersecurity measures essential. The AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention 2014) provides a continental framework for addressing cyber threats. International partnerships, such as collaborations with Estonia in e-governance and cybersecurity, offer opportunities for knowledge transfer, capacity building and the development of African-led digital solutions.

Africa must also exercise stringent control over the importation of arms, balancing the need for military capability with the imperative of reducing conflict and protecting development priorities. While arms imports can strengthen defence capacity, they also risk perpetuating instability and diverting resources from socio-economic development. Between 2011–2015 and 2016–2020, arms imports by African states decreased by 13 per cent, yet significant regional disparities remain (SIPRI 2021). The AU's "Silencing the Guns" initiative aims to eliminate armed conflicts by 2030, underscoring the necessity of a coordinated approach to conflict resolution, arms regulation and sustainable security solutions.

In summary, Africa's path toward Agenda 2063 requires a decisive shift toward self-reliance, innovation and African-led solutions. By investing in science and technology, strengthening regional institutions, asserting control over security and arms policy and fostering sustainable cybersecurity capabilities, the continent can reduce dependency on external actors, safeguard its autonomy and realise its long-term developmental ambitions.

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