



Peace, Security and Stability as Key Factors to the Successes of the AfCFTA Collective Efforts Towards the Agenda 2063

Wellington Ndlovu; Godfrey Chikowore; Edmore M. Chijoko

Zimbabwe Open University Harare Zimbabwe, BICESTER, Oxfordshire, United Kingdom

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100700405>

Received: 10 July 2026; Accepted: 15 July 2026; Published: 01 August 2026

ABSTRACT

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represents Africa's most ambitious economic integration initiative, driving towards the African Union's Agenda 2063 vision of a prosperous, peaceful and integrated continent. However, the persistent prevalence of armed conflicts, insecurity and political instability across Sub-Saharan Africa constitutes one of the principal impediments to the realisation of the AfCFTA's strategic objectives. Drawing on a systematic review of the empirical, conceptual and policy-oriented literature on trade, integration and conflict, supplemented by documented country-level conflict and economic indicators, this study examines the nexus between peace, security and stability and the collective economic aspirations of the AfCFTA in the digital economic epoch. Findings reveal that conflict-afflicted states, including Mozambique, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and South Sudan, have experienced significant deterioration in their Gross National Income, social fabric and economic productivity as a direct consequence of instabilities. The study concludes that peace, security and stability are not merely desirable preconditions for economic development but are indispensable foundational requirements for the success of the AfCFTA and the broader Agenda 2063 aspirations, and the literature synthesis addresses a causal and contextual gap that the broader trade-conflict literature has itself identified as unresolved.

Keywords: Peace, security, stability, conflict, AfCFTA, Agenda 2063, Sub-Saharan Africa, economic integration, border governance.

INTRODUCTION

The AfCFTA is at the crossroads. On one hand, it has emerged as a transformative economic integration framework with the potential to reshape the continent's economic trajectory, reduce poverty and position Africa as a formidable force in the global economy. On the other hand, the prevalence of armed conflicts, political instability and structural insecurity continues to undermine the foundational conditions necessary for its vision to be achieved. The juxtaposition of these two realities, an unprecedented continental ambition for a single market of 1.3 billion people, set against a persistent landscape of conflicts, constitutes the central problem that this study explores.

Without individual state and continental peace, security and stability, the African continent's Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) strategic frameworks will be difficult to achieve. The goal of global development policy is the eradication of poverty and the promotion of social, economic and political development, a goal that calls upon the international community and African member states to silence the guns and resort to inclusive governance and diplomatic conflict resolution strategies. Through the AfCFTA, African nations have expressed a collective determination to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies free from fear and violence.

The challenge is also that tariff schedules, rules of origin, and customs modernisation protocols are technical instruments, yet they are being deployed on a continent where some countries, for example Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and Mozambique, expected to anchor regional value chains, are experiencing conflicts. This creates a coherence problem where an integration project premised on predictable movement of goods, people and capital is being implemented in a volatile environment. Understanding how this coherence problem is



documented and interpreted across the existing literature on economic, security, and governance is therefore not a peripheral academic curiosity but also a quest about whether the AfCFTA can deliver its objectives.

There is a direct correlation between peace and development, as Virji et al. (2019) assert that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. Lorenzini (2022) has confirmed this symbiotic relationship, declaring that without security, development is fruitless, and without development, security is pointless. This study is premised on the understanding that peace, security and stability are not peripheral concerns but rather the central pillars upon which the AfCFTA's collective wisdom must be built. The continent, through the African Union's (AU) architecture, must ensure peace and harmony as the essential building blocks of the African Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. This requires applying collective capabilities to remove risk factors associated with environmental sustainability, civil wars, cybersecurity and other destabilising forces (Adeyeye, 2024). The study focuses on Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Mozambique to provide country-level context that indicates the peace-trade context in the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa where AfCFTA's peace-promoting logic is most severely tested. In addition, the study proposes an original conceptual model, the Peace–Security–Development Integration (PSDI) Framework, which reframes the relationship between economic integration and conflict as co-constitutive rather than sequential, and which explicitly incorporates the digital and institutional dimensions that existing frameworks have partially treated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background and Context of the AfCFTA

The African Continental Free Trade Area is Africa's most ambitious economic integration project since the establishment of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and a flagship initiative of the AU's Agenda 2063. Its primary objective is to create a single continental market for goods and services with the free movement of people and investments, thereby promoting intra-African trade, reducing dependency on foreign markets, enhancing competitiveness, supporting economic transformation, and paving the way for the establishment of a continental customs union. If fully attained, the AfCFTA would allow African countries to make significant progress towards the United Nations' SDGs, particularly SDG 1, which focuses on reducing poverty in all its forms.

Mude (2025) positions the AfCFTA as a stabilising institution whose creation of a single market for 1.3 billion Africans is expected to deepen interdependence and sustain peace, while Carlo, Bernardo and Alex (2021) argue that full AfCFTA implementation, by strengthening multilateralism and cross-sectoral cooperation, can reduce the incentives that sustain proxy conflicts on the continent. These framings reinforce the proposition of this study that economic integration and peace-security outcomes are mutually constitutive rather than sequential.

On an operational scale, AfCFTA member states agreed to liberalise at least 97% of tariffs. Tariffs on 90% of goods are to be eliminated within five years, or ten years for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) since the inception of AfCFTA. For a further 7% of sensitive goods, tariffs are to be reduced within ten years and thirteen years for LDCs. However, the paradox is that some LDCs remain heavily dependent on tariff revenues and have expressed concerns about the asymmetric implications of this arrangement, raising the prospect of intra-bloc disagreements that could generate conflict and undermine the AfCFTA's cohesion. It is against this backdrop that the AfCFTA must promote a level playing field anchored on mutual respect and understanding.

Essentially, poverty reduction demands that the continent mobilise its expertise and capabilities to foster a free, fair and just environment that abhors conflict emanating from unfair economic and social practices. Furthermore, peace and harmony are prerequisites, and the AfCFTA dream cannot be achieved if the continent allows conflicts, insecurity and instability to persist. Therefore, the African Union must deploy new and innovative peacebuilding mechanisms at a greater scale than before for the continent to realise its cherished vision of one Africa advancing economic and social prosperity, the agenda of fair trade and silencing the guns (Virji et al., 2019).

Democracy, Peace, Security and Stability

Democracy, peace, security and stability are widely recognised as prerequisites for sustainable economic and human development. The mutually reinforcing interlinkages between these variables in Africa are indisputable, though complex. Support for democracy and sustainable peace in several African countries has been hindered by protracted and violent conflicts, including civil wars (Udochukwu et al., 2025). The AU has set itself aspirational goals in this domain, declaring that a culture of peace and tolerance should be nurtured across diverse demographics in Africa through peace education (Virji et al., 2019).

This aspiration is rooted in the philosophy of Pan-Africanism, which calls upon the continent to cultivate tolerance, problem-solving skills and mutual understanding at early human developmental stages. The education of young and youthful populations must be championed through a collective vision that is indigenous and of African origin, where peace emanates from the foundational principles of Pan-Africanism. For Africa to be great, its collective wisdom should be directed towards removing borders and allowing the free movement of its population across the continent, as Botswana and Namibia have done through their shared commitment to trade and economic prosperity (Amadi, 2023).

Virji et al. (2019) argue that no development can succeed where democracy is scarce. In its democracy promotion and peacebuilding mission, the AU has built an expansive normative framework coupled with mechanisms and institutions to implement it. These have been instrumental in strengthening democratic governance in member states emerging from conflict. The normative framework reflects the AU's efforts to promote democratic governance and the rule of law, both of which are critical for people-centred socio-economic development.

A notable doctrinal shift distinguishes the AU's contemporary approach from its predecessor. Unlike the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Charter (1963), which embraced non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, the AU Constitutive Act (2000) adopts a doctrine of non-indifference to human rights abuses within member states' territories (Lynne, 2017). This shift has emboldened the AU in its democracy-promotion and peacebuilding mandate, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states, and has been instrumental in facilitating greater stability in parts of the continent, thereby creating conditions more conducive to economic productivity and prosperity.

The Infrastructure of Peace in Africa

The AU's normative infrastructure for peace comprises several interconnected instruments. The Constitutive Act, together with the 2000 Lomé Declaration and the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, constitutes the foundational building blocks of the AU framework for the protection and promotion of democracy. Article 3 of the Constitutive Act outlines the objectives of the AU, specifically citing the promotion of democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance. To fulfil this objective, which also benefits the AfCFTA member states, the AU developed the Peace and Security Council (PSC), which deals with conflict prevention and unconstitutional changes of government through the tenets of international law. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) was conceived as the functional framework for managing peace and security across the continent. APSA has made significant strides in reducing conflicts by deploying technological, financial and human resource capabilities aimed at stabilising affected countries. Beyond this state-centric institutional architecture, however, the wider literature cautions that peace and security governance cannot be reduced to formal, state-led mechanisms alone. Owiso and Kasera (2025) demonstrate, in the IGAD borderland context, relevant to the Horn of Africa, that security governance frameworks premised solely on border integrity and sovereignty routinely overlook the human-security realities that sustain borderland livelihoods, and that harmonised, community-inclusive governance is required if trade integration is to yield peace dividends rather than new grievances.

The Peace–Trade Nexus in African Scholarship

The relationship between peace and development has been extensively theorised. Udochukwu et al. (2025) posit that development requires the removal of major sources of oppression, poverty, tyranny, poor economic

opportunities, systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities and repressive state activities. This conception of development as freedom is particularly relevant to the AfCFTA context, where structural barriers to trade mirror structural barriers to peace. Kharbouch (2024) reinforces this perspective, asserting that peace and security are key variables towards economic development. Tossou (2025) further emphasise that the capacity constraints of African peacekeeping institutions, in terms of knowledge, skills, technology and finance, often result in inadequate responses to crises, leaving member states vulnerable to prolonged instability. These institutional limitations have direct implications for the ability of the AfCFTA to achieve its economic integration goals.

Wennmann (2019) have examined economic agendas embedded within civil wars, demonstrating that conflicts are not merely political but are frequently driven by greed and competition over natural resources. This analysis is relevant to the AfCFTA framework, as resource-driven conflicts disrupt supply chains, deter investment and undermine the rule of law necessary for a functioning single market. This review converges with a distinct, quantitative and conceptual body of scholarship that has tested and theorised the trade–conflict relationship directly, including within the specific Horn of Africa states examined in this review. Foundational political-economy work by Pollins (1989) established that bilateral trade flows respond to states' underlying amity or enmity, implying that commerce and security orientation are mutually adjusting rather than independent variables.

AfCFTA: Evidence from the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia

The findings of this review are situated within the specific empirical and conceptual literature on trade, integration and conflict in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia because this review's comparative analysis was focused on the Horn of Africa. Using logistic regression on dyadic trade and openness indicators across the East African region, Beyene (2014) reports that trade interdependence and economic openness are associated with a reduced likelihood of interstate conflict onset, though the relationship is characterised as reciprocal rather than strictly one-directional, since security conditions themselves shape trade patterns. Complementary lagged-regression evidence in Beyene (2015) similarly finds that international trade is associated with a reduction in political disputes once temporal dynamics are accounted for. This suggests that deeper economic integration envisaged by the AfCFTA can dampen interstate conflict incentives if favourable conditions prevail.

Farah (2024) argues that rule-based trade cooperation in landlocked countries can stabilise interstate relations among the countries in the Horn of Africa. Yet Henneberg and Stapel (2020) show that the cooperative bloc-building among Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia carries consequences, both stabilising and destabilising, for wider Eastern African security dynamics depending on how durably political commitments are institutionalised.

This suggests that peace dividends from integration in the Horn are contingent on negotiated political arrangements rather than flowing automatically as products of trade liberalisation. Furthermore, Owiso and Kasera (2025) show that informal cross-border trade in the IGAD region, directly relevant to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, generates security risks where state-centric border control neglects borderland communities' human-security needs, implying that AfCFTA-related border facilitation must be paired with inclusive security governance to avoid entrenching insecurities rather than resolving them. In the same manner, Yoon and Kim (n.d.) and Kim (2021) frame the AfCFTA as a security-economy agenda with the potential to expand the space for non-elite and civil-society actors in continental security discourse, extending the peace-security conversation beyond political elites alone.

With regards to implementation, Joseph (2024) frames the AfCFTA as a potential catalyst for peace through investment and stability, but stresses that this potential is conditional on managing continent-wide security threats such as coups, intercommunal violence, violent extremism and transnational crime. Tochukwu and Abraham (2024) go further, characterising infrastructural, policy and border-governance deficits as existential constraints on AfCFTA delivery, meaning that in the absence of adequate implementation capacity, integration cannot be expected to yield the peace dividends that ideological and normative accounts anticipate.

Udombana (2020) adds an institutional-legal dimension, arguing that the welfare and stability gains of economic integration are contingent on strong, faithfully implemented legal and institutional design rather than being intrinsic to integration itself, while Formella (2023) cautions that structural conditions across African economies can obstruct the productivity gains on which the AfCFTA's peace logic depends.

Critique: Literature Divergences

While the peace-development nexus is broadly accepted within the literature, a number of significant divergences demand critical examination. To begin with, the dominant peace-development discourse has been criticised for being overly state-centric and insufficiently attentive to the structural conditions of global economic inequality. Some researchers argue that the unfair rules of global trade and climate change, primarily triggered by the industrial activities of developed states, are the underlying causes of new wars and recurring conflicts in AfCFTA member states (Niyonzima, 2025). From this perspective, the securitisation of development discourse risks obscuring the role of external actors and global economic structures in perpetuating African instability. If peace is treated solely as a precondition for economic development, rather than development being treated as a pathway to peace, policy responses may be fundamentally misaligned.

There is also a tension within the AfCFTA framework itself regarding trade liberalisation and conflict. While the reduction of tariff barriers is intended to foster economic integration, asymmetric impacts on LDCs could generate internal tensions. Some LDCs depend heavily on tariff revenues, and the accelerated timeline for liberalisation may create economic disruptions that fuel domestic grievances and political instability, thereby directly undermining the very peace conditions necessary for the AfCFTA to function effectively. This internal contradiction within the AfCFTA design is insufficiently acknowledged in existing scholarship.

More so, the normative optimism surrounding the AU's institutional architecture is contested. While the AU's doctrinal shift from non-interference to non-indifference represents a theoretical advance, practice has demonstrated persistent gaps between aspiration and implementation. The APSA's capacity constraints- financial, technical, logistical and operational- have limited its ability to translate mandates into effective conflict prevention. Tossou (2025) have documented these capacity deficits extensively, yet the literature has been slow to translate these empirical findings into reformed institutional design recommendations. This concern is corroborated by continental-scale analysis of AfCFTA implementation itself, where infrastructural, policy and border-governance deficits are described as existential rather than incidental constraints (Tochukwu & Abraham, 2024). Chijoko (2026) attributes this to the operational absence of the AU at the country level to provide effective early-warning systems and timely preventive interventions through coordination, resourcing and oversight mechanisms.

The other concern is that existing literature tends to treat peace, security and stability as a unified construct. However, according to Galtung (1969), these are analytically distinct concepts. Peace may refer to the absence of armed conflict (negative peace) or to the presence of just social conditions (positive peace). Security may relate to state security, human security or economic security. Stability may reflect either legitimate governance or the entrenchment of authoritarian regimes. The conflation of these concepts risks producing policy prescriptions that achieve one dimension at the expense of others, for example, achieving state stability through repressive governance that undermines human security and democratic participation. This conflation is echoed in the specific Horn-of-Africa literature, where state-centric border-security approaches have been shown to overlook the human-security dimensions of borderland trade, producing governance responses that may satisfy formal sovereignty concerns while deepening informal-sector insecurity, thereby entrenching the notion of state or political elite security at the expense of human security (Owiso & Kasera, 2025).

Another concern was that studies that model economic openness as a predictor of reduced conflict onset in East Africa explicitly acknowledge that the relationship may be reciprocal: conflict and insecurity can suppress trade just as readily as trade can suppress conflict, and underlying political amity or enmity conditions both (Beyene, 2014; Pollins, 1989).

Moreover, this literature itself acknowledges a geographic and case-selection limitation, in that much of the available evidence remains broad East Africa or continent-wide analysis rather than country-specific testing

of AfCFTA implementation in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. The present review's six-country synthesis, drawing on documented conflict and economic indicators alongside the wider trade-conflict literature, is well placed to address this gap, though the same caution regarding causal direction applies equally to literature-based inference.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines for reporting systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021). It started with developing a search strategy, and then setting eligibility criteria, screening the literature, and then extracting data. Articles were obtained using SciSpace, SciSpace Full Text, and Google Scholar, which together returned 1,155 records. After removing 423 duplicates, 732 unique records remained. The search combined the core terms "peace", "security", "stability" and "conflict" with "trade", "AfCFTA" and "Agenda 2063", together with the regional qualifiers "Sub-Saharan Africa" and "Horn of Africa", applied across the title, abstract and keyword fields of each database. Records were then ranked for relevance using each database's own algorithm, which weighs keyword matches, citation counts and how closely the abstract tracks the search terms, and the 500 highest-ranked records were carried forward to screening.

Four inclusion criteria and three exclusion criteria were set. Studies within the Sub-Saharan African context, on peace/security-trade relationships, engaging with AfCFTA or Regional Economic Community (REC) integration, or addressing digital trade infrastructure were included, while studies with a purely military focus, macroeconomic analyses that ignored peace and security, or work with no substantial African grounding were excluded. The 500 records were screened in two stages: an initial title-and-abstract screening against the four inclusion and three exclusion criteria above, followed by a full-text screening of the records that passed this first stage, after which twenty-eight (28) papers were finally selected as the most relevant. Each of these was then read against six extraction categories, including study design and methodology, key findings, the peace-security mechanisms examined, such as APSA, RECs, and conflict-resolution processes, factors bearing on AfCFTA implementation, regional focus, and policy recommendations. The extracted data were then organised through a narrative, thematic synthesis built around these six categories, allowing findings to be compared both across countries and across themes (Creswell, 2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Multi-Faceted Causes of Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa

Since the end of the Cold War, Africa has been embroiled in a plethora of intra- and interstate conflicts with transnational character and consequences that extend far beyond their immediate geographical contexts. The causes of these conflicts are multifaceted. The reviewed literature and documented secondary sources converge around five primary conflict drivers, and these include: weak democratisation processes, deep-seated environmental problems, competition for natural resources, breakdown of the rule of law, and the proliferation of private armies and militias accompanied by illicit arms trafficking. Each of these drivers is directly antithetical to the conditions required for the AfCFTA to function effectively.

As indicated in Farah (2024), weak democratisation processes emerge consistently across the reviewed country reports and literature as a foundational driver, particularly where contested transitions of power, disputed elections, or the absence of credible mechanisms for peaceful political competition created grievances that subsequently escalated into armed conflicts. Sources focusing on the Horn of Africa in particular emphasise that unresolved questions of political representation and regional autonomy have repeatedly proven more combustible than purely economic grievances, a pattern that resonates with the Horn-specific literature's emphasis on political cooperation and reciprocity, rather than trade liberalisation alone, as the primary lever for stability (Henneberg & Stapel, 2020).

Deep-seated environmental problems, including recurrent drought, desertification and competition over increasingly scarce arable land and water resources, are identified in the documented country evidence as a

slower-moving but no less significant conflict driver, particularly in pastoralist and agro-pastoralist border regions. These environmental pressures are reported to interact with competition for natural resources as populations displaced by environmental stress move into areas already contested on ethnic, political or economic grounds. Sources focusing on mineral-rich and resource-rich conflict zones further note that royalties for access to natural resources were also to blame for financing and sustaining armed groups (Wennmann, 2019).

The breakdown of the rule of law is also identified as both a cause and a consequence of conflict. An initial erosion of judicial independence, policing capacity or contract enforcement created space for armed actors and illicit economies to flourish, while sustained conflict, in turn, further eroded the remaining institutional capacity. The proliferation of private armies, militias and illicit arms trafficking networks is also described in the reviewed literature as a force multiplier that transformed localised grievances into sustained, often transnational, armed conflict, frequently outlasting the political circumstances that originally gave rise to them.

These conflicts are characterised by the involvement of multiple actors, deep entrenchment, complexity and protracted duration. Despite being categorised as intrastate or interstate, they consistently occur within complex regional security systems, creating transnational linkages that make resolution significantly more difficult. They are often underpinned by economic agendas and have seen the militarisation of civilian space, recruitment of children, subversion of human rights and humanitarian law, and massive displacement of populations. A recurring pattern across the reviewed country evidence is that these five drivers rarely operate in isolation; rather, they compound one another in ways that make conflict resolution and the restoration of conditions conducive to AfCFTA implementation more difficult.

Country-Level Evidence

Mozambique (Southern Africa)

In the SADC region, Mozambique is embroiled in an insurgency in the Cabo Delgado province, where an estimated five thousand deaths have been recorded. Multiple AU member states have seconded resources to Mozambique through the APSA framework in an attempt to restore peace, security and stability. The conflict has resulted in severe deterioration of the country's economic and social fabric, with crime reaching unprecedented levels and economic stagnation constraining growth. Mozambique's experience illustrates the direct negative correlation between armed conflict and economic productivity, with the AfCFTA's objectives rendered unattainable in the affected region.

Cameroon and West Africa

In West Africa, the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, driven by the intersection of identity politics and the exploitation of natural resources, has resulted in over six thousand recorded deaths. Neighbouring countries have received significant influxes of refugees and migrants, placing considerable strain on national resources. Affected countries have committed substantial proportions of their national resources to the management and welfare of migrants in accordance with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the provisions of the Geneva Convention IV. These resource diversions have been made at the direct expense of economic development and productive investment, illustrating the cascading economic costs of regional instability (Udombana, 2020).

Ethiopia (Horn of Africa)

In East Africa, Ethiopia experienced the Benishangul-Gumuz civil conflict, which recorded a cumulative figure of nineteen thousand deaths (Beyene, 2014). The high death toll has deterred international economic partners from engaging with Ethiopia, resulting in a significant decline in social and economic productivity and GNI reaching its lowest recorded levels. The conflict has damaged Ethiopia's position as a regional economic anchor, a role that is critical to the AfCFTA's coherence in the Horn of Africa (Beyene, 2015). Ethiopia's experience shows what happens to that relationship when conflict, rather than openness, becomes

the dominant force, damaging the very economic anchor role that regional integration requires. It also lends empirical weight to Henneberg and Stapel's (2020) observation that Ethiopia's bilateral relations with Eritrea and Somalia carry consequences for wider Eastern African stability well beyond its own borders.

Eritrea

Even though Eritrea is not yet a member of the AfCFTA, instability in the country has far-reaching consequences in the region. The Tigray war in Eritrea accounted for approximately three hundred thousand deaths, substantially reducing the country's Gross National Income and precipitating severe economic decline. Poverty and the breakdown of the social fabric were acutely pronounced, with populations surviving below the international poverty line of one US dollar per day. The scale of human suffering and economic destruction underscores the catastrophic and long-lasting consequences of sustained armed conflict for AfCFTA in the Horn of Africa (Farah, 2024). The scale of intrastate conflict recorded in Eritrea shows that trade cooperation dynamics among Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia (Henneberg & Stapel, 2020) cannot by themselves substitute for the resolution of underlying political and security grievances.

Sudan and Somalia

In Sudan, the spill-over effects of the Tigray war resulted in Ethiopia-Sudan border clashes, claiming a cumulative figure of thirteen thousand five hundred deaths and compounding existing structural vulnerabilities in both countries. Somalia continued to experience significant and largely undocumented casualties from ongoing armed activity. Collectively, these countries experienced significant and sustained instability in 2022 and beyond, with spillover effects on neighbouring states adversely affecting broader regional economic stability and prosperity. The Somali evidence in particular reinforces Owiso and Kasera's (2025) argument that informal cross-border trade and security governance failures in the IGAD borderlands generate risks that state-centric, sovereignty-focused security responses are ill-equipped to resolve.

Structural Consequences for the AfCFTA

The evidence amassed across the six case countries reveals a consistent pattern of armed conflict and sustained insecurity, which generates economic stagnation, undermines state capacity, diverts resources from productive investment to security expenditure, deters foreign and domestic investment, and erodes the institutional foundations necessary for trade facilitation and dispute resolution, all of which are core operational requirements of the AfCFTA. States experiencing sustained conflict, such as Mozambique and Ethiopia, are compelled to redirect resources from infrastructure, customs modernisation and trade facilitation programmes towards military and security expenditure. Investor confidence is also curtailed. Both foreign and regional investors treat conflict-affected states as categorically higher-risk destinations, regardless of the specific sectoral opportunities that might exist, resulting in capital flight and reduced access to the trade finance instruments on which cross-border commerce depends. Institutional and human capital erosion is also affected. Sustained conflict degrades the customs, judicial and regulatory institutions needed to implement AfCFTA protocols, while simultaneously driving skilled personnel into displacement or emigration. Regional spillover effect also results from instability. For example, as the Sudan-Ethiopia border clashes and the wider Horn dynamics illustrate, instability in one member state generates negative externalities such as refugee flows, disrupted transit corridors, and heightened security expenditure for neighbouring states that may themselves be committed AfCFTA implementers (Joseph, 2024).

The escalation of conflicts has resulted in peacebuilding and reconstruction actors becoming overwhelmed, contributing to prolonged conflict cycles such as the Eritrea-Tigray war, which involves complicated factors that continue to hinder peace processes. The capacity of these actors to manage conflicts in Liberia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mozambique is now consuming the majority of Africa's resources that should be directed productively towards the AfCFTA's strategic objectives (Tochukwu & Abraham, 2024).

Cross-Country Comparative Discussion

Comparatively, the six cases reveal both convergence and divergence in how conflict interacts with the AfCFTA's economic aspirations. All six countries share the common pattern, discussed above, whereby conflict diverts resources, deters investment and erodes institutional capacity. Yet the specific mechanisms and severity of these effects differ meaningfully across cases. Mozambique's insurgency in Cabo Delgado illustrates how a geographically bounded, resource-linked conflict can nonetheless generate continental-scale reputational and investment consequences, given the sub-region's strategic importance to regional gas and mineral value chains. Cameroon's Anglophone crisis illustrates how identity-based grievances, when unresolved, generate sustained regional migration and resource-diversion pressures on neighbouring states well beyond the immediate conflict zone (Formella, 2023).

The Horn of Africa cluster, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, presents a complex pattern, since these three states are simultaneously bound together by shared conflict spillover, competing bilateral relations, and overlapping regional cooperation initiatives. Ethiopia's experience shows the economic cost of losing a regional anchor role, Eritrea's experience shows the scale of human and economic devastation that can accompany protracted interstate conflict even where cooperative bloc-building has been attempted (Henneberg & Stapel, 2020) and Somalia's experience shows how chronic, lower-intensity but sustained insecurity interacts with informal cross-border trade and weak border governance to produce a distinct pattern of insecurity that state-centric responses have struggled to resolve (Owiso & Kasera, 2025). Sudan and South Sudan, finally, illustrate how conflict spillover across shared borders can compound pre-existing structural vulnerabilities in ways that are not reducible to either country's domestic conflict dynamics alone.

Conflict Type, Duration and Intensity: A Comparative Assessment

Read alongside one another, the six documented cases also permit a preliminary comparison of how conflict type, duration and intensity relate to the severity of the reported trade and economic effects, a dimension the country narratives above touch on individually but do not yet draw together. Ranked by recorded death toll, the cases run from Mozambique's geographically bounded, resource-linked insurgency in Cabo Delgado (approximately five thousand deaths) and Cameroon's identity-based Anglophone crisis (over six thousand deaths), through the Sudan-Ethiopia border clashes (thirteen thousand five hundred deaths) and Ethiopia's Benishangul-Gumuz civil conflict (nineteen thousand deaths), to the Eritrea-linked Tigray war, whose toll of approximately three hundred thousand deaths is an order of magnitude greater than any other case reviewed. The documented economic evidence broadly tracks this ordering, Mozambique and Cameroon's more geographically contained conflicts produced significant but sub-national economic and resource-diversion effects, whereas Ethiopia's higher death toll coincided with a marked deterioration in GNI and the loss of its regional economic-anchor role, and Eritrea's far larger and more protracted conflict corresponded to the most severe documented decline in Gross National Income and social welfare of the six cases, with populations recorded below the international poverty line. Conflict type also appears to matter independently of scale, Somalia's chronic, lower-intensity but sustained insecurity produced a different pattern of harm again, one channelled through informal cross-border trade and weak border governance rather than through large-scale casualties (Owiso & Kasera, 2025), indicating that duration and governance failure, and not death toll alone, can generate significant trade disruption.

This comparative pattern should, however, be read as an ordering suggested by documented, literature-based evidence rather than as a causal estimate, since the review's synthesis method cannot isolate the independent effect of conflict intensity or duration from the many other factors, including pre-existing state capacity, geographic position and sectoral composition, that also shape trade outcomes in each country. Establishing the measurable, causal weight of conflict intensity, peace agreements and security improvements on trade flows and AfCFTA participation, and undertaking comparative case studies that set these conflict-affected economies against more stable AfCFTA implementers, is consequently identified as a necessary next step for the econometric and comparative literature building on this review.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study has demonstrated, through both documented country-level evidence and a synthesis of existing scholarship, that peace, security and stability are indispensable foundational requirements for the success of the AfCFTA and the broader African Agenda 2063. The evidence from Mozambique, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and South Sudan reveals consistent and severe economic consequences of sustained armed conflict, including declining GNI, collapsing social services, resource diversion and regional instability that extends well beyond national borders. While institutions devoted to peace and security are being established across Africa's sub-regions, their capacity, including knowledge, skills, technology, finance and trained personnel, often remains inadequate. Many African actors continue to urge donors and the international community to enhance the capacity of African institutions. However, such external dependency is inherently fragile and insufficient to meet the needs on the ground. A logical and sustainable step toward an effective intervention strategy is to assess existing institutions and organisations, identify capacity gaps and appraise the potential of African organisations to address crises in the digital era. The study further concludes that the AfCFTA cannot succeed as a standalone economic framework without a parallel and equally robust peace and security architecture. Economic integration and conflict prevention must be conceived as mutually reinforcing processes, not sequential ones. This conclusion converges directly with the wider literature's own diagnosis of the trade–peace nexus in the Horn of Africa, that trade interdependence can reduce conflict onset (Beyene, 2015). This is consistently qualified by evidence that implementation capacity, border governance and political cooperation determine whether that potential is realised (Owiso & Kasera, 2025).

Recommendations

1. Strengthen conflict prevention and APSA capacity.

Invest in early-warning systems and predictable, multi-year financing for the African Peace and Security Architecture, so peace-building shifts from reactive crisis response to genuinely anticipatory action.

2. Build long-term peace through education and knowledge institutions.

Embed peace education in national curricula and mobilise universities and research institutions to close the country-specific evidence gap, addressing conflict at its generational roots rather than only its symptoms.

3. Extend peace and security architecture into the digital and economic domains.

Develop digital peace and security frameworks alongside flexible, differentiated trade liberalisation timelines, so that cybersecurity threats and the economic dislocation of LDCs do not become new sources of instability.

4. Ground AfCFTA implementation in local and human-security realities

Reform the Horn of Africa border governance to include borderland communities and informal traders, and institutionalise the use of documented country-level evidence in policy design, ensuring reforms respond to on-the-ground conditions rather than aggregate continental indicators.

5. Advance econometric and comparative testing of the peace-trade relationship.

Building on the documented, literature-based comparative ordering set out in this review, future research should apply econometric approaches to measure the effect of conflict intensity, peace agreements and security improvements on trade flows and AfCFTA participation, and should undertake comparative case studies of conflict-affected and stable African economies, so as to identify the conditions under which regional integration can succeed despite conflict.

DISCUSSION OF MODEL: THE PEACE–SECURITY–DEVELOPMENT INTEGRATION FRAMEWORK

This study proposes and operationalises what may be termed the Peace–Security–Development Integration

(PSDI) Framework as the conceptual model underpinning the analysis of the AfCFTA’s prospects within the African Agenda 2063. The PSDI Framework posits that the realisation of the AfCFTA’s economic integration objectives is contingent upon the simultaneous and mutually reinforcing attainment of three foundational conditions, which include, peace, defined as both negative peace, the absence of armed conflict, and positive peace, the presence of just social institutions, security encompassing state, human and economic security dimensions, and stability understood as legitimate, accountable governance that upholds the rule of law.

The model departs from linear, sequential conceptions of the peace-development relationship, which tend to treat peace as a precondition to be achieved before development can begin. Instead, the PSDI Framework conceives peace, security, stability and development as co-constitutive and co-produced processes. Investment in economic development, trade facilitation and digital infrastructure strengthens the material conditions for peace; conversely, sustained peace creates the institutional environment necessary for economic investment to yield productive returns. This co-constitutive premise is consistent with the reciprocal relationship documented between trade and conflict in the East African literature (Beyene, 2014), which likewise resists a one-directional reading of the trade–peace relationship.

Within the AfCFTA context, the PSDI Framework identifies three operational pillars. The first is the institutional pillar, encompassing the AU’s normative architecture, including the APSA, the PSC, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the AU Constitutive Act, as the formal institutional scaffolding for peace and security governance. The second is the economic pillar, comprising the AfCFTA’s trade liberalisation, tariff reduction, investment facilitation and digital economy frameworks. The third is the human capital pillar, encompassing peace education, youth engagement, civil society participation and inclusive governance as the long-term social foundation for sustainable peace and development. This third pillar draws additional theoretical support from the securitisation literature, which shows that expanding the space for non-elite and civil-society actors in continental security discourse is itself a mechanism through which integration can be rendered more peace-supportive (Kim, 2021).

The PSDI Framework further incorporates a digital dimension that existing models have insufficiently addressed. In the digital economic epoch, cybersecurity, digital governance and the regulation of emerging technologies constitute a fourth, cross-cutting pillar that intersects with and influences all three primary pillars. Conflicts increasingly have digital vectors; trade increasingly has digital infrastructure; and governance increasingly has digital dimensions. An integrated model of peace, security and development for the AfCFTA era must therefore be digitally literate.

The PSDI Framework acknowledges the external structural dimension identified in the critical literature: that the conditions of global trade, climate change and geopolitical competition create exogenous pressures that shape the peace-security-development nexus in Africa. An effective model must therefore account for both endogenous African agency, through the AU, AfCFTA institutions and member states, and exogenous structural constraints that may require multilateral negotiation and reform. Formella’s (2023) caution that structural conditions across African economies can obstruct integration’s productivity gains, and Udombana’s (2020) emphasis on faithful institutional implementation as a precondition for welfare effects, both reinforce the framework’s insistence that peace dividends from integration are conditional rather than automatic.

The PSDI Framework provides a holistic, multi-dimensional and digitally-responsive conceptual model for understanding and addressing the complex interplay between peace, security, stability and economic integration in the AfCFTA context. Its adoption as a guiding framework by AfCFTA institutions, AU organs and member state governments would represent a meaningful step towards a more coherent and effective approach to realising Africa’s Agenda 2063 aspirations.

REFERENCES

1. Adeyeye, J. A. (2024). *The African Union’s Peace and Security Architecture* (pp. 17–36). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-8235-6_2

2. Amadi, V. (2023). A Flexible Approach to Enabling the Free Movement of People in Southern Africa. *Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa*. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2522-3062/12608>
3. Beyene, H. G. (2014). Trade, interdependence and its effect on interstate conflict: The case of the East African region. *Journal of Economic Cooperation and Development*, 35(4).
4. Beyene, H. G. (2015). Does International Trade Reduce Political Disputes?. *Foreign Trade Review*, 50(2), 99–117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0015732515572058>
5. Carlo, P., Bernardo, V., & Alex, V. (2021). *Free trade, peace and prosperity*. <https://doi.org/10.2815/458263>
6. Chijoko, E. M. (2026). CHAPTER 6: Building resilient peace for the successful implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area. In *New African Thinkers* (pp. 96–118). Lynne Rienner Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780798305501-011>
7. Creswell, J. W. (2007). Qualitative research. In *Handbook of social research* (pp. 143–184). Sage.
8. Farah, A. A. (2024). The Possibility of Trade-Based Cooperation among Horn Countries that Advances Political Stability and Prosperity. *International Journal of Geopolitics and Governance*, 3(1), 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.37284/ijgg.3.1.2533>
9. Formella, C. N. (2023). *The allegory of the African Continental Free Trade Area: an optimistic prescription? Köz-gazdaság*. <https://doi.org/10.14267/retp2023.03.06>
10. Henneberg, I., & Stapel, S. (2020). Cooperation and conflict at the Horn of Africa: A new regional bloc between Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia and its consequences for Eastern Africa. *Africa Spectrum*, 55(3), 339–350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002039720936689>
11. Joseph, J. E. (2024). Critical factors to consider in the trade–security nexus of the African Continental Free Trade Area: A catalyst for establishing peace. *African Security Review*, 33(2), 131–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2024.2303459>
12. Kharbouch, O. (2024). *Perspectives Politiques et Économiques sur la ZLECAF: Un Avenir pour l'Intégration Africaine*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12599131>
13. Kim, S. Y. A. S. (2021). Towards new African security: A prospective role of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). *Korean Journal of Defence Analysis*, 33(2), 337–356.
14. Lorenzini, S. (2022). *Development and the security paradox* (pp. 329–343). Routledge eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429356940-30>
15. Lynne, R. (2017). *International Development Research Centre*.
16. Mude, T. (2025). *The african continental free trade area and peacebuilding*. <https://doi.org/10.64449/9781997468233-10>
17. Niyonzima, E. (2025). *Globalisation and Conflicts: A Review*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16208717>
18. Owiso, M. O., & Kasera, O. A. (2025). Informal cross-border trade and security concerns in the IGAD region: An interrogation of the policy framework. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 13(01), 9–25. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2025.131002>
19. Pollins, B. M. (1989). Conflict, Cooperation, and Commerce: The Effect of International Political Interactions on Bilateral Trade Flows. *American Journal of Political Science*, 33(3), 737. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111070>
20. Tochukwu, O., & Abraham, A. (2024). Afcta and economic integration in Africa: Issues in implementation and development. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, VIII(IX), 1051–1062. <https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2024.809090>
21. Tossou, A. (2025). *Internal and External Constraints of the African Union's Mediation in the Malian Crisis: Perspectives for a Strengthened Role in Conflict Management in Africa for a Sustainable Compromise*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15762407>
22. Udochukwu, I. S., Uche, A. V., & Haroun, F. (2025). Navigating the Nexus of War, Peace, and Development in Africa. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, IX(III), 651–661. <https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2025.90300052>
23. Udombana, N. J. (2020). A Step Closer: Economic Integration and the African Continental Free Trade Area. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3797090>



24. Virji, H., Sharifi, A., Kaneko, S., & Simangan, D. (2019). The sustainability–peace nexus in the context of global change. *Sustainability Science*, 14(6), 1467–1468. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S11625-019-00737-1>
25. Wennmann, A. (2019). *The Political Economy of Violent Conflict Within States*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ACREFORE/9780190846626.013.370>
26. Yoon, S., & Kim, S. (n.d.). *Towards new African security: A prospective role of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)*. <https://doi.org/10.22883/kjda.2021.33.2.008>