

Globalization Aggravates the Challenges of International Security and Social Development: A Discussion in the Context of Sustainable Social Transformation

¹Irene K. Maswan., ²Prof. Sam Nyanchoga

¹Postgraduate Student, Tangaza University, School of Arts and Social Sciences PhD in Social Transformation

²Lecturer, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Tangaza University

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1306000188>

Received: 07 June 2026; Accepted: 12 June 2026; Published: 29 June 2026

ABSTRACT

Globalization has increased the interdependence of countries' economies, politics, societies, and technologies at the aggregate level, leading to benefits across all levels but also exacerbating international security problems and the lack of development, especially in structurally vulnerable areas of sub-Saharan Africa. Utilizing a critical transformationalist approach and the original Globalization Vulnerability Perspective derived in this paper, the study utilized reflexive thematic analysis of recent secondary sources of data (2021-2026), such as United Nations reports, World Bank data, the Global Terrorism Index, Oxfam analyses, UNCTAD debt reports, and African institutional publications. It looks at the worsening impact of globalization on transnational terrorism, cyber threats, hybrid threats, resource issues, structural inequality, cultural polarization, and the polycrisis of corruption, debt, and climate-related risks. The dynamics are based on two detailed empirical case studies: the Sahel polycrisis (in the context of Burkina Faso) and the resource curse in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The analysis shows the extent to which these challenges negatively affect the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063. But outcomes are not guaranteed. Based on these findings, the study suggests actionable mitigation pathways that focus on ethical glocalization, such as faster implementation of the AfCFTA, digital innovation, diaspora engagement, and multilateral reforms, as well as participatory Pan-African agency. These initiatives aim to shift the nature of globalization from exploitation to collective equity, human dignity, and shared resilience. This study concludes that globalization is part of a system that exacerbates a vulnerability trap through asymmetric integration, transnational networks, and unequal power relations, with mutually reinforcing processes of insecurity, inequality, and institutional fragility.

Keywords: globalization, international security, social development, vulnerability trap, sustainable transformation, Africa, Agenda 2063, SDGs, glocalization, polycrisis

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The world has been radically redefined by globalization, which has increased the economic, political, social, and technological interdependence among nations. This process has brought about tremendous aggregate benefits, including the ability to lift more than a billion people out of extreme poverty since 1990, as well as increased inequalities, transnational security threats, and social development challenges, especially in structurally vulnerable regions such as sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (World Bank, 2024).

This paper contends that globalization systematically exacerbates international security and social development gaps in fragile contexts, while also providing contingent opportunities for transformation. This study takes a critical transformationalist approach (Held et al., 1999; Giddens, 1990), rather than the optimistic or pessimistic views found in other accounts. It illustrates how the open networks of globalization can enable non-state actors,

exacerbate structural inequalities, and spread systemic shocks, and suggests ways in which globalization can be used ethically—by adaptively embedding global forces into local agency, local institutions, and African priorities in both Agenda 2063 and the SDGs.

This study is original because it reflectively synthesizes recent secondary data (2021-2026) that focuses on Africa. It goes beyond general statements and examines in detail the mutually reinforcing relationship between security and development in the context of globalization, using empirical examples from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sahel. This paper brings together international reports, World Bank indicators, and information from African institutions to offer a policy-relevant framework for socially sustainable transformation that emphasizes regional integration, technological innovation, and equitable multilateralism.

Globalization has helped the diffusion of knowledge, transfer of technology, and global health responses, such as the rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines. However, these advantages have not been equally shared. Globalization has frequently appeared in sub-Saharan Africa as extractive investment, debt entanglements, loss of culture, and sensitivity to external shocks without offsetting improvements in human development and institutional strength. This is a security paradox: the same highly interconnected systems that facilitate commerce and collaboration also exacerbate terrorism, cyberattacks, hybrid warfare, and irregular migration.

Social development, as measured by Amartya Sen's capabilities approach (1999), has also been weakened. Unskilled workers, rural areas, and women are subjected to low labor standards, centralized wealth, and reduced social cohesion, while the elites and skilled workers are privileged. The dynamics directly call into question the central tenets of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

In this study, a reflexive thematic analysis of high-quality secondary sources is used to critically examine these dynamics. It highlights exacerbating mechanisms and actionable mitigation pathways based on African agency. The paper begins with theoretical models of globalization and continues with a description of the method, empirical results, and a suggestion for a glocalized approach to sustainable transformation.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Models of Globalization

Globalization continues to be one of the most debated phenomena in the study of international relations, international political economy, and development studies. The three most influential analytical models are the hyperglobalist, the skeptical, and the transformationalist (Held et al., 1999), which are examined critically in this section. This paper, by breaking down some fundamental assumptions, successes, and problems of globalization and applying them specifically to the context of sub-Saharan Africa, provides a critical transformationalist framework for analyzing the impact of globalization on international security and social development.

The Hyperglobalist Model: Liberal and Capitalist Optimism

The hyperglobalists' model, which is liberal and capitalist in nature, views globalization as an inevitability and a largely favorable process that erodes national boundaries and creates a unified, efficient global economy. The “commercial peace” or “liberal peace” hypothesis is based on Adam Smith's free-market ideas and extended by neoliberal institutionalists like Keohane and Nye (1998), who posit that greater economic interdependence, combined with the ideas of comparative advantage, leads to a decrease in the probability of interstate conflict, helps align national interests through stable trade, and contributes to the growth of prosperity.

In the view of contemporary hyperglobalists, this can be measured by the success of the export-led industrialization of East Asia and the dramatic decrease in extreme poverty between 1990 and 2019 (from 38% to 8.5%), which is mainly due to the growth of trade, foreign direct investment, and technology diffusion (World Bank, 2024). Under this perspective, free trade and capital mobility create efficiency, which, in turn, leads to “lifting all boats” by job creation, growth of public revenues, and the propagation of democracy.

While this study recognizes these general gains, it argues that hyperglobalism's optimism is analytically problematic in structurally vulnerable settings. FDI concentrations in extractive industries (oil, gas, and

minerals) in sub-Saharan Africa remain high, driving enclave economies that deepen inequality and resource-based conflicts rather than inclusive development. The demand for cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for instance, is central to the transition to eco-friendly energy, is driving armed militias and human rights abuses, and provides few employment opportunities or technological spillovers for the local population (Amnesty International, 2023). Furthermore, as geopolitical tensions grow, especially between the U.S. and China, it becomes evident that many expectations of mutually beneficial integration are fragile, primarily because strategic coercion, debt entanglements, and technological decoupling point to deep power differences.

This part of the paper highlights these distributional issues and lays the groundwork for the broader transformationalist perspective developed here, which explores the opportunities and adverse effects of globalization on security and social development in Africa.

The Skeptical Model: Realist and Nationalist Critiques

The skeptical model is an alternative to the hyperglobalist one that suggests the impact of globalization and its potential for transformation are much greater than they actually are. Globalization does not change the anarchic, state-centric character of international politics; rather, it accentuates the prevailing power structures. Realist thinkers like Waltz (1979) and Mearsheimer (2001) argue that states remain the principal actors, striving for security and relative power in a self-help system in which cooperation can lead to vulnerability and interdependence rather than cooperation. Nationalists' concerns broaden when they point to the loss of economic self-determination, cultural identity, and democratic representation, as evidenced by the rise of protectionism and the emphasis on the nation's interests in populist movements on both continents.

This model has been supported by the empirical evidence in Africa. Despite decades of integration efforts, intra-African trade remains low at 15-18% of total trade, compared with around 70% in Europe (UNCTAD, 2024); thus, economic fragmentation and dependence on the outside world persist. In 2023, the external debt of Sub-Saharan Africa was at \$1.1 trillion (or 60% of the regional GDP), and the cost of servicing the debt had risen to 18.7% of government revenues, three times the figure recorded in 2014 (United Nations, 2025). These realities dovetail with skepticism about the effects of globalization, which tend to reinforce rather than undermine core-periphery hierarchies.

This study, however, acknowledges several key constraints of the skeptical model. It is very state-centric and underestimates the increasing role of non-state actors such as terrorist networks, transnational criminal organizations, multinational corporations, and digital platforms that exploit global flows in a manner that goes beyond and often defies state authority. This analytical fault prevents a full explanation of the complex security-development nexus discussed in this paper.

The Transformationalist Model: A Critical and Generative Middle Ground

The most complex and analytical model is the transformationalist model, which was developed by Giddens (1990) and Held et al. (1999). It recognizes globalization is a legitimate and far-reaching phenomenon that is changing the nature of state sovereignty, cultural identity, and economic systems in ways never before witnessed. Transformationalists, on the other hand, do not believe that globalization will produce results as hyperglobalists do, and they do not question the extent to which this is the case, as skeptics do. The model is determined by the quality of governance, institutional capacity, and the strategic use of political agency by states, civil society, and multilateral institutions.

It draws on the ideas of world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974), dependency theory (Frank, 1967), and postcolonial scholarship (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1961). It sees globalization as a dynamic and contested space, with power asymmetries that are likely to be reproduced but can also be challenged and reconfigured at the local level through local agency. One of the more fruitful ideas is glocalization—the local adaptation of the global—which creates hybridizations rather than the homogenization often feared.

In terms of persistence, it can be seen as a useful theory to explain the resource curse and structural inequalities in the African context; and, in terms of mitigation, it can be said to be an effective theory for explaining elements

in the African context that can help mitigate these challenges. Some examples include the innovation of M-Pesa in mobile banking in Kenya and the anticipated African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which will help improve intra-African trade and regional GDP by a considerable margin (Afreximbank, 2024). This framework is further supported by recent scholarship that considers the impacts of COVID-19, climate change, and geopolitical changes (Mariotti, 2025).

Table 2.1: Comparative Analysis of Globalization Models in the African Context

Model	Core Assumption	Strengths	Limitations in the African Context	Relevance to This Study
Hyperglobalist	Inevitable beneficial integration	Explains poverty reduction & tech diffusion	Ignores asymmetries & the resource curse	Highlights the benefits but is insufficient for vulnerabilities
Skeptical	Globalization overstated; states are dominant.	Explains persistent dependency & debt	Underestimates non-state actors & digital threats	Useful for structural critiques
Transformationalist	Contingent outcomes via agency	Balances structure & agency; supports glocalization	Requires strong empirical grounding	Adopted framework—best explains security-development nexus & mitigation pathways

This paper is written from the critical transformationalist perspective. It highlights the irritants of globalization in fragile states and opportunities for ethical glocalization, regional integration, and Pan-African agency, which are directly reflected in the empirical findings and policy recommendations in subsequent sections.

Theoretical Position of the Study: The Globalization Vulnerability Perspective

This study builds on the critical transformationalist model, introducing a globalization-vulnerability perspective as its main theoretical stance. A view that suggests globalization, despite its overall positive effects upon the global population, could be creating structural vulnerabilities for fragile and peripheral states, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. By its asymmetrical incorporation in global economic, digital, and security systems, it creates complementary cycles of insecurity, inequality, and institutional fragility that hinder sustainable social change.

The core of the globalization vulnerability perspective is the security-development nexus, as the same borderless movement that fuels trade, capital transfer, and technological advancement also fuels transnational threats (terrorism, cybercrime, hybrid warfare) and exacerbates social development gaps in terms of resource extraction, debt dependency, cultural erosion, and vulnerability to external shocks. In some less institutionalized places, this creates a self-reinforcing “vulnerability trap” that directly undermines the SDGs and the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

Importantly, this view is anti-deterministic. Building on the transformationalist perspective, it focuses on contingent outcomes shaped by local agency and institutional innovations. It calls for a deliberate process of adapting global processes to African realities, which it calls “ethical glocalization,” and which should include regional integration (e.g., AfCFTA), leapfrogging technologies, and changing the nature of multilateral governance. This study presents an original policy-oriented perspective that brings together models, practice, and possibilities, focusing on African experiences and Southern epistemologies.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) of secondary qualitative data to critically examine, in sub-Saharan Africa, how globalization worsens international security and social development issues (Braun & Clarke, 2022). RTA was chosen for its flexibility in capturing patterns in complex transnational phenomena and for its ability to achieve deep reflexivity, which is crucial for an African postgraduate student studying processes that disproportionately affect the African continent.

a) Secondary Data Analysis Rationale

Secondary qualitative analysis can facilitate efficient, timely, and ethically appropriate investigation into issues that are geographically and politically sensitive, without the logistical, financial, and security constraints of conducting primary fieldwork in conflict-stricken areas (Kelly, 2024). Because there are many good, publicly available sources of reliable information, this strategy is analytically sound. It allows triangulation across multiple viewpoints to make the findings more credible and/or deeper.

b) Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The data were selected deliberately from authoritative institutional reports, policy documents, and peer-reviewed scholarship published between 2021 and 2026. Some key sources include United Nations system reports, World Bank analyses, the Global Terrorism Index, Oxfam inequality assessments, UNCTAD debt sustainability reports, Afreximbank publications, and documents from the African Union. An intentional effort was made to balance Northern and Southern voices to reduce epistemic bias in globalization scholarship and to include the voices and experiences of Africans on the ground.

c) Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted within the framework of Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase approach to RTA, namely, (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) developing themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) report production. These were used both inductively (data-driven) and deductively (theory-driven), and analysis was performed at both the semantic (surface) and the latent (underlying power dynamics) levels. Three themes emerged related to the aggravating mechanisms of globalization, the security-development nexus, and glocalization opportunities.

d) Reflexivity and Limitations

Reflexivity was emphasized throughout the process. As a scholar of African studies, the researcher was sensitive to the danger of perpetuating victimhood narratives and minimizing structural agency. This work recognizes that no study is possible without secondary data, and though this research has a large amount of secondary data available, it may limit the depth and detail of context-specific insights. To counter that, the findings are based on detailed empirical patterns illustrated in Section 4, including those of terrorism in the Sahel and of resource dynamics in the DRC. Mixed-methods designs—which combine interviews, surveys, and/or field-based case studies—would be useful to consider for future research to complement and validate the secondary findings.

This methodical approach is rigorous and reflective, and it enhances the policy relevance of this paper's findings for sustainable social transformation in Africa, which has a critical transformationalist approach.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the reflexive thematic analysis are presented here, providing an overview of systematic exacerbation of international security and social development issues in structurally vulnerable contexts, with a specific focus on sub-Saharan Africa due to globalization. The analysis identifies reinforcing mechanisms that produce a “vulnerability trap,” consistent with the globalization vulnerability perspective adopted in this study.

Globalization's Aggravation of International Security Challenges

Globalization has drastically changed the nature of international security, increasing cross-border interconnectedness and creating new pathways for the emergence, spread, and evolution of threats. As globalization is promoted as an enabler of economic cooperation, technological progress, and international integration, it has, at the same time, created new opportunities for transnational insecurity, especially in structurally vulnerable regions like sub-Saharan Africa, this study says. Globalization lowers barriers to communication, capital, people, and technology movement and puts state and non-state actors on equal footing in utilizing systems of interconnectedness for strategic, political, and criminal gain.

Globalization is not just a phenomenon that exists with current security issues; it often exacerbates these vulnerabilities by serving as a technological platform, a financial system, and a transnational connection that allows local conflicts to evolve into regional and global security issues. The results indicate three key ways in which globalization exacerbates global security threats: (1) the creation of more powerful non-state violent groups, (2) the proliferation of cyber and hybrid threats, and (3) the deepening of competition over resources and geopolitical tensions.

Terrorism and the Empowerment of Non-State Violent Actors

The greatest security threat posed by globalization is the increase in the capacity of non-state violent actors to operate. The terrorist organizations' structure and activism have been completely transformed by developments in communication, financial globalization, and the movement of people. Today's insurgent groups are more transnational and are likely to be part of far more interwoven networks that enable recruitment, financing, propaganda, information gathering, and logistical support to occur across multiple jurisdictions.

Empirical evidence indicates that this is an increasing problem. The Global Terrorism Index 2024 shows that there were 8,352 incidents of terrorism-related deaths in the world in 2023, a rise of 22% from the previous year, the highest number since 2017. Specifically, it was found that sub-Saharan Africa suffered almost half of all terror-related deaths globally, and the Sahel was identified as the hotspot of modern global terrorism (Institute for Economics and Peace [IEP], 2024). In 2023, the deaths from terrorism reached about 1,907 in Burkina Faso, corresponding to a rise of 68% from 2022 and nearly one-quarter of the global total of terrorism deaths.

Insecurity is transnationalized, as is demonstrated by the transnational expansion of Boko Haram, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). They use encrypted communication channels, social media platforms, mobile money, and other informal cross-border financial networks to plan actions and rally troops. Extremist actors use digital technologies to instantly spread their ideology to vulnerable populations and across wide geographic areas that would otherwise not be reached. Thus, globalization has made terrorism a highly networked phenomenon rather than a problem of local security.

Globalization and terrorist activities are not just about technology. Economic globalization has also led to unequal development outcomes, which can create conditions for radicalization. Throughout the Sahel, as youth unemployment and poverty remain constant realities, political participation is limited, and a sense of marginalization persists, while exposure to global information is growing. This comparison produces a "relative deprivation effect"—the idea that people who are looking at global measures of prosperity and opportunity become frustrated and disillusioned. Extremist groups exploit these grievances and offer financial rewards, a sense of identity, and a sense of belonging to those on the outside.

In terms of the Globalization Vulnerability Perspective, terrorism does not just appear as a product of ideological extremism but rather as a result of the interplay between the global interconnectedness and the local vulnerabilities. Extremist actors can take advantage of globalization to carry out their operations, and poor institutions, a lack of economic opportunities, and weak democratic governance can provide fertile ground for recruitment and mobilization. The relationship is a vicious circle in which the absence of security leads to underdevelopment, and underdevelopment leads to greater insecurity. The outcome is significant challenges to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and the ambition of Agenda 2063 for a 'Peaceful and Secure Africa.'

Cyber Threats, Hybrid Warfare, and Digital Interdependence

The advent of the digital revolution is one of the most significant changes in globalization, impacting the global economic systems, governance, and social relations. The new digital interconnectedness has, at the same time, created unprecedented, borderless cybersecurity vulnerabilities that pose new challenges to traditional notions of security. Cyber threats are now an integral part of international security as the world depends on digital infrastructure more than ever.

Today's increasingly frequent cyber incidents show how incidents in one network can have cascading impacts in multiple countries and sectors. The 2020 SolarWinds attack proved this point, compromising thousands of public and private organizations through a single software supply-chain attack. Likewise, ransomware attacks against critical infrastructure, healthcare, financial institutions, and government organizations have demonstrated the sophistication of transnational cybercriminal networks. Current cyber insecurity, which is increasingly interconnected across digital systems, is one of the most pressing global risks for governments and businesses, according to the World Economic Forum (2025).

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is yet another example of the spread of hybrid warfare in a globalized world. In addition to military engagement, the conflict has featured cyberattacks on energy and food supply chains, coordinated misinformation campaigns on social media and other platforms worldwide, economic coercion, and the strategic use of energy resources. These advances illustrate the growing extent to which the battle space is global, not just in physical terms but also in informational and economic dimensions.

The digitalization-development nexus has both opportunities and risks for African countries. Innovations like Kenya's mobile money service, M-Pesa, have significantly enhanced access to economic opportunities and financial inclusion. However, these technologies also make it more vulnerable to cybercrime, fraud, ransomware attacks, and digital espionage. Many developing countries are particularly susceptible to transnational cyber threats due to a lack of cybersecurity infrastructure, weak regulatory frameworks, and a shortage of cybersecurity professionals.

The globalization vulnerability perspective seeks to understand this paradox by noting that digital integration both strengthens opportunities and exposes people to greater risk. States with limited institutional capabilities are more vulnerable to cyber threats when incorporated into global digital systems without the necessary institutional capacity to secure them. Digital globalization, therefore, has the potential to unwittingly reinforce dependencies and vulnerabilities and to weaken economic resilience and human security.

Resource Dynamics, Strategic Debt, and Geopolitical Competition

Competition over strategic resources, financial power, and geopolitical position is the third mechanism by which globalization exacerbates international security problems. The importance of critical minerals, energy resources, transportation corridors, and new technologies is growing and is becoming an important factor in international relations and security. The integration of global economic systems increasingly shapes international relations and security dynamics by influencing access to critical minerals, energy resources, transportation corridors, and emerging technologies.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a case in point. Cobalt is a key mineral for battery production in electric vehicles, renewable energy, and cutting-edge technologies, with the country accounting for around 70% of global production. The growing worldwide demand for cobalt reflects the importance of the green energy transition, but its development has had a limited impact on local communities. Rather, armed conflict, human rights violations, environmental harm, and illegal resource extraction have often occurred in mining areas. The fact that these challenges persist reveals how integration in the global commodity market can, in a context of weak governance institutions and external control of value chains, increase insecurity.

Financial globalization has done the same, creating new security weaknesses through borrowing. UNCTAD (2025) reports that Sub-Saharan Africa's external debt was US\$1.1 trillion or about 60% of regional GDP in 2023. Debt-servicing costs account for almost 18.7% of government revenues, leaving limited fiscal space for security, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and climate adaptation. High levels of debt can reduce state capacity, contribute to social unrest, and foster political instability, posing threats to national and regional security.

The vulnerabilities are exacerbated by geopolitical competition. As major powers like the United States and China have grown more competitive, it has become common for many African nations to be the sites of strategic competition over infrastructure projects, resource extraction, technology transfers, military-to-military ties, and

diplomatic influence. This engagement can offer significant development opportunities but can also lead to dependency, limit policy autonomy, and put pressure on states regarding external politics.

From a perspective of globalization vulnerability, resource competition, debt dependency, and geopolitical rivalry are interrelated aspects of a larger security-development problem. Globalization is a process that links states to international systems, creating growth opportunities but also exposing them to insecurities beyond their control. The vulnerabilities exacerbate structural inequalities and limit efforts to achieve sustainable peace, prosperity, and self-reliance (SDG16) and the "Agenda 2063" vision of sustainable peace, prosperity, and self-reliance.

The aggravation of social development challenges due to globalization

Although globalization has helped advance technology, stimulate economic expansion, and bind nations together, its social implications have been highly uneven and controversial. According to this study, globalization has exacerbated social development problems in structurally vulnerable societies, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, by perpetuating social inequalities, undermining social cohesion, and increasing vulnerability to external economic shocks. Globalization, with its benefits of mobility, innovation, and access to global markets, has largely been enjoyed by privileged groups at the expense of large parts of the world, resulting in the marginalization of many people from development benefits.

The Capabilities Approach of Amartya Sen (1999) defines social development as the growth of freedoms, opportunities, and capabilities that enable individuals to live good lives. In this sense, development is related to access to education, healthcare, decent employment, social participation, cultural identity, and political inclusion. The results indicate that when integration occurs in the context of structural inequality, weak institutions, and asymmetric power relations, these capacities are often compromised.

In line with the Globalization Vulnerability Perspective advanced in this study, globalization worsens social development problems in three principal ways: it creates an undercurrent of structural inequality and unequal distribution of benefits, it creates a culture of fragmentation and undermines social cohesion, and it increases vulnerability to global economic shocks from integration into global value chains.

Structural Inequality and the Failure of Redistributive Integration

One of the most longstanding criticisms of globalization is that it leads to unequal development results. Globalization has increased overall global wealth and reduced the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, but at the same time, the distribution of these benefits has been highly unequal both within and between countries. This study reveals that globalization often prioritizes economic gains for political elites, multinational corporations, highly skilled workers, and those directly linked to the global economy, while marginalized communities are rarely given a voice in economic development.

Recent research is beginning to show the scale of this problem. The wealthiest (5%) of Africans account for around US\$4 trillion in wealth, making them richer than the other 95% of the continent's population combined (Oxfam's Inequality Inc. Report, 2024). These inequalities highlight the unequal distribution of the advantages of globalization within society and help to explain why it sustains pre-existing patterns of privilege and exclusion. In the absence of strong institutional mechanisms that transfer resources from the rich to the poor, globalization can intensify social division.

The South African experience is a good example of this. South Africa, despite being one of the most industrialized economies in Africa and being well connected to the global economy, still has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 0.63 (World Bank, 2024). Black South Africans continue to face high rates of youth unemployment, which is currently over 33%. This is because the patterns illustrate that market integration does not necessarily lead to inclusive development outcomes.

An important reason for these disparities is the greater mobility of capital compared to labor. Globalization facilitates the relocation of investments and profits by multinational corporations and wealthy individuals to

other countries and jurisdictions, thereby limiting governments' capacity to tax using progressive taxes. At the same time, developing countries often bid for foreign investment with tax and regulatory advantages and labor-market flexibility. These measures could increase investment inflows, but they can also reduce a state's ability to fund social protection, public services, and redistributive policies.

Inequality is seen not only as a social product but also as a process that reproduces vulnerability from the perspective of globalization vulnerability. Social mistrust is further eroded, injustice may be perceived, and long-standing political grievances could lead to social unrest and instability. In conclusion, the unequal benefits of globalization pose a threat to SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and the vision of inclusive and equitable development outlined in the Agenda 2063.

Cultural Fragmentation, Social Cohesion, and Epistemic Injustice

Globalization has also had significant cultural, social, and knowledge impacts, not only on the economy but also on cultural identity, social relationships, and systems of knowledge. The speed of information and media dissemination, and the spread of lifestyle and cultural values across borders, have increased interaction between societies and created significant tensions regarding identity, belonging, and social cohesion.

Traditional social frameworks and mechanisms of communal support and collective responsibility have historically occupied key positions in social cohesion and social welfare in many African societies. In Southern Africa, ubuntu; in Kenya, harambee; and in Tanzania, ujamaa are philosophies that focus on solidarity, reciprocity, and the good of the community. In fact, globalization has helped promote individualistic consumer cultures based on competition, materialism, and the personal quest for success rather than collective responsibility.

The cultural metamorphosis has led to intricate social implications as seen in this study. Youth are growing up in an environment where multiple value systems are in constant conflict with the local cultural values they have grown up with and the global cultural values brought through digital platforms, entertainment industries, and transnational social networks. Cultural exchange can be a source of enrichment for a society and of greater opportunities for personal expression, but can also lead to identity crises, intergenerational conflict, and the erosion of traditional social support.

Another significant issue is epistemic injustice. In the postcolonial perspective, globalization often brings Western modes of knowledge production into ascendancy, while indigenous African modes remain peripheralized (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1961). Local knowledge systems are poorly acknowledged and integrated into international development agendas, policy frameworks, and governance models within predominantly Northern-based institutions. As a result, African societies can evolve into knowledge consumers, increasing intellectual dependence and limiting the possibility of context-specific solutions to development problems.

These dynamics become even more complex with digital platforms. While social media has enabled key civic campaigns like #EndSARS in Nigeria and increased citizens' opportunities to engage, it has also contributed to the spread of misinformation, hate speech, political polarization, and foreign influence campaigns. Social trust and democratic discourse are undermined by information systems driven by algorithms, which often reinforce divisive content and increase engagement.

Cultural fragmentation and epistemic injustice are two important social aspects of vulnerability according to the globalization vulnerability perspective. In the event of loss of cultural identity and social trust within communities, and a lack of involvement in knowledge production, the potential for collective action or sustainable development is reduced. These dynamics directly challenge SDGs 4 (Quality Education), 11 (Sustainable Communities), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and the transformative development vision of Agenda 2063, both of which focus on people and culture.

Vulnerabilities of the global value chain and systemic economic shocks

The third way globalization exacerbates social development problems is by increasing national economies'

exposure to systemic external shocks. Globalization has made production processes more interconnected across countries, enabling companies to reach foreign markets, reduce costs, and boost efficiency through complex global value chains (GVCs). This has also generated new forms of vulnerability, however, because local livelihoods have been tied to economic events far from home and in places not under the control of the national state.

This vulnerability was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of disruptions to supply chains, trade, tourism, and migration on the global economy were significant. The World Bank estimates that the pandemic's economic impact pushed an additional 97 million people into extreme poverty worldwide in 2020 (2022). In Sub-Saharan Africa, some of the worst consequences were loss of export revenues, lower remittance inflows, disruptions to educational systems, and increased food insecurity.

African economies tend to be engaged in lower-value parts of global production networks, with exports of raw materials and primary commodities and imports of higher-value manufactured products. Such a role exposes countries to commodity price cycles and reduces the likelihood of technological upgrading and industrial diversification. Trade linkages can therefore quickly pass through global trade networks to affect job creation, wages, and fiscal revenues in and out of respective countries when triggered by an economic shock elsewhere.

COVID-19 is not the first example of the fragility of global value chains; the global financial crisis in 2008, climate shocks to food and energy markets, and disruptions due to geopolitical conflicts are just a few examples. The crises have highlighted the extent of interdependence and, at the same time, the inability of many developing nations to protect themselves from external shocks arising from globalization.

The globalization vulnerability perspective suggests that these shocks tend to impact societies with already weak institutions, insufficient social protection measures, and significant poverty levels. In such settings, external shocks can quickly set back development gains, exacerbate inequalities, and heighten social tensions. The integration of globalization into global value chains can thus bring both opportunities and paradoxes, as the very systems that create growth opportunities can also leave vulnerable populations in a cycle of economic insecurity.

The findings thus indicate that the way to sustainable social transformation is not just to passively integrate into global markets but to be strategically involved, with a focus on value addition, economic diversification, resilience building, and inclusive development. If these are not addressed, globalization will continue to generate social vulnerabilities, which will impact progress towards SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and Agenda 2063's vision of sustainable prosperity.

The Security-Development Nexus: Intersecting Cycles of Vulnerability

One of the key results of this study is the strong and reinforcing security-development nexus that globalization systematically exacerbates in fragile contexts. Security threats and social development gaps are not isolated problems but rather interlinked and mutually reinforcing cycles, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. This nexus lies at the heart of the globalization vulnerability perspective.

Countries in the Sahel have high rates of structural youth unemployment, often over 30%, and even higher among rural and less educated youth, which leads to a constant flow of youth who could become members of violent extremist groups. The financial gains, sense of belonging, and ideological motivation provided by these organizations, including JNIM, IS-Sahel Province, and Boko Haram/ISWAP, present a strong temptation for many youth who are vulnerable to the promise of inclusive employment that has been lacking in the process of globalization, coupled with economic marginalization and cultural disorientation.

As insecurity becomes entrenched, it creates a downward spiral: Attack creates infrastructure destruction; infrastructure destruction results in displacement of population; displacement of population causes lack of domestic and foreign investment; lack of domestic and foreign investment diverts scarce government resources from social services to military and emergency responses; military and emergency responses lead to further insecurity. The loss of state capacity further undermines institutions, undermines service delivery, and

exacerbates the very grievances that drive recruitment and instability. This vicious circle is very hard to break and has proven nearly impossible to eradicate with conventional solutions.

Climate change is a potent catalyst in this triad. Recurrent droughts, floods, and desertification in the Sahel and Horn of Africa regions increase the competition for the limited availability of arable land and water resources, in turn, which can lead to intercommunal conflicts that terrorist groups are quick to exploit. Meanwhile, rising commodity demand, especially for minerals essential to the transition to green energy, puts further stress on already fragile ecosystems without providing any adaptation finance or local development opportunities.

This study argues that the security-development nexus represents one of globalization's most damaging outcomes in structurally weak states. It directly undermines multiple Sustainable Development Goals simultaneously (notably SDGs 1, 8, 13, and 16) and poses a serious obstacle to the realization of Agenda 2063's vision of a peaceful, prosperous, and integrated Africa. Breaking these cycles requires integrated, multi-dimensional responses that address both immediate security threats and underlying structural vulnerabilities.

The Polycrisis Triad: Corruption, Debt, and Climate Vulnerability

This study unveils a particularly potent polycrisis triad of endemic corruption, unsustainable external debt, and disproportionate climate vulnerability that globalization systematically exacerbates in sub-Saharan Africa. However, these challenges are not independent but rather mutually reinforcing, making them more difficult to overcome for social sustainability. Their intersection highlights the effects of globalization on the interconnectedness of financial, political, and environmental systems and how it can exacerbate structural vulnerabilities in many African countries already in a trap. They converge to demonstrate how globalization can exacerbate structural weaknesses in interconnected financial, political, and environmental systems, intensifying the vulnerability trap faced by many African countries.

One of the biggest governance issues facing the region is endemic corruption. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2025) shows that sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest average score, and many countries rank below 20 out of 100, indicating severe governance and accountability problems in the region. Corruption is usually seen as a local problem, but globalization has created new possibilities for criminal financial activities in offshore financial centres, through the use of shell firms, trade misinvoicing, and complex transnational corporate structures. According to the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2020), Africa is estimated to lose around US\$88.6 billion annually to illicit financial flows, equivalent to 3.7% of Africa's GDP. These losses harm the government's capacity to invest in health care, education, infrastructure, and security, eroding state legitimacy and effectiveness.

The second polycrisis pillar is unsustainable external debt. Africa's total external debt in 2023 exceeded US\$1.1 trillion, a significant rise over the last decade, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2024). In many African economies, the debt-servicing burden is high and has been imposing a significant strain on public finances, resulting in around 18.7% of government revenue being spent on debt servicing, which constrains fiscal space for investment in development (UNCTAD, 2024). This increased dependence on commercial borrowing, which is costly and shorter-term, has further contributed to debt vulnerabilities. As a result, many governments are forced to allocate more funds to debt repayment than to social protection, climate adaptation, infrastructure, and security sector reform. This vicious circle exacerbates reliance on foreign financing and restricts national policy space.

Climate vulnerability is the third component of the climate triad. Despite accounting for only 3-4% of cumulative global greenhouse gas emissions, Africa is significantly affected by climate change, including longer droughts, flooding, desertification, food insecurity, and climate-induced displacement (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] 2023; United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP] 2024). This inequity is part of a larger picture of environmental injustice observed worldwide, where climate change disproportionately impacts the least culpable. Globalization also exacerbates these vulnerabilities by driving up global demand for minerals such as cobalt, lithium, and copper, which are crucial to the green-energy transition. This demand creates economic opportunities but also puts pressure on vulnerable ecosystems and local communities.

Meanwhile, climate financing commitments from developed nations continue to fall short of Africa's adaptation and resilience needs, limiting the continent's ability to effectively address mounting climate risks.

Based on this research, it can be concluded that the polycrisis triad is exacerbated by globalization, both in its structural conditions and enabling mechanisms. Structural factors, such as asymmetric integration into global markets, commodity export dependence, unequal access to finance, and weak bargaining power within international institutions, generate vulnerability. At the same time, facilitating mechanisms, such as global financial networks, international commodity markets, and transnational investment flows, help sustain and reinforce the continuation and co-dependency of corrupt practices, debt dependency, and climate vulnerability. Poor debt management and climate governance reduce the availability of resources to fight corruption and to finance adaptation to climate change; fiscal pressures resulting from climate shocks drive further borrowing, and this further pushes up fiscal risks during adaptation and emergency responses to climate change; and climate change and climate-related shocks aggravate effective debt management and climate governance, making it harder to fight corruption. Such interactions create a vicious circle that limits sustainable development and diminishes institutional resilience.

Taken together, this evidence shows that corruption, indebtedness, and climate vulnerability are not separate problems. Rather, they are interrelated and form a polycrisis that systematically hinders progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The triplets also pose a danger to the achievement of the vision of a prosperous, integrated, and self-reliant Africa as envisaged in Agenda 2063. To break this cycle, domestic governance reforms alone are not enough; a meaningful restructuring of the global financial, environmental, and development governance systems will also be a central focus of the mitigation pathways.

Empirical Case Studies of the Globalization Vulnerability Trap

Empirical validation is necessary to gauge the explanatory value of the Globalization Vulnerability Perspective proposed in this research and the thematic mechanisms described in the previous sections. This section thus explores two cases that are strategically relevant—the polycrisis in Burkina Faso's Sahel and the global mineral economy in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These cases were chosen because they are unique but interrelated expressions of vulnerability arising from globalization. Burkina Faso serves as an example of how globalization can enable the transnational spread of insecurity—through digital connectivity, cross-border movement, and extremist networks—and the DRC shows how integration into the global commodity market can exacerbate resource conflicts, governance gaps, and developmental inequalities. Taken together, the cases highlight the intersections of global processes and local structural vulnerabilities and how these intersections create self-reinforcing cycles of insecurity, poverty, and institutional fragility.

Burkina Faso and the Sahel Polycrisis: Globalization and the Transnationalization of Insecurity

The Sahel has emerged as one of the most dynamic security spaces in the modern international system. The region has seen a sharp rise in levels of terrorism, violent extremism, organized crime, climate-induced displacement, and governance crisis in the last ten years and is stretching across West and Central Africa. The Sahel region was the world's largest terror hotspot in 2023, with the region responsible for almost 48% of all deaths from terrorism, making it the top global region for violent extremism, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace (2024).

Burkina Faso may be the most striking example of the globalization vulnerability perspective in the Sahel. Before 2015, it was generally thought that the country was less volatile than its neighbours. But the growth of transnational extremist groups such as Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP) has completely changed the country's security situation. According to the Global Terrorism Index (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024), Burkina Faso was the country with the highest number of terrorism-related deaths worldwide in 2023, with nearly 1,907 fatalities annually, up from less than 100 in 2014.

The implications of this trend are far from trivial, given the number of deaths alone. It highlights the impact of globalization on the operational context. Today, extremist groups are not just recruiting locally and exercising their control over a defined area. Instead, they work within highly interconnected transnational networks, leveraging the infrastructure of globalization. Terrorist groups can now coordinate activities across several jurisdictions with unprecedented efficiency, thanks to encrypted communication platforms, mobile financial systems, social media networks, and the informal cross-border trade routes (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023). While the technological advancements that have made global commerce, communication, and the sharing of knowledge, ideas, and information easier have also allowed extremist actors to recruit, spread propaganda, raise funds, and plan operations.

The Burkina Faso case also illustrates how globalization and structural socioeconomic vulnerabilities have interacted. The country has one of the youngest populations in the world, with about 65 percent of its citizens under 25 (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2024). Although the economy has grown somewhat over the preceding decades, jobs have not increased sufficiently to keep pace with population growth. Youth unemployment and underemployment are especially high in areas with high poverty rates, low infrastructure, and poor state presence (World Bank, 2024a). Access to the world media and digital platforms has increased awareness of economic inequalities and alternative ways of life, leading to relative deprivation, the perception of a gap between the expectations and achievable opportunities, as Gurr (1970) put it. These grievances have been well exploited by the extremist organizations, who provide financial benefits, social integration, and alternative governance to marginalized communities.

The social impact has been far-reaching. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2024) reported that over 2 million Burkinabè people are internally displaced due to the violence. Thousands of schools have been shut down, impacting the education of hundreds of thousands of children and the potential for human capital development. In areas experiencing conflict, food production has been severely reduced, leading to food insecurity and livelihood losses (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] 2024). The findings vividly bring out the security-development nexus discussed earlier in this study: insecurity undermines development, and underdevelopment, in turn, creates conditions that sustain insecurity.

Burkina Faso is a good example of the globalization-vulnerability perspective on a globalization-induced vulnerability trap. Local grievances have been exacerbated by the interconnectedness at the global level, in terms of spreading extremist ideologies, strengthening terrorist capabilities, and highlighting the inequalities that occur in the world without offering the same opportunities for inclusion. The consequence is a vicious circle of insecurity that can only make institutions more fragile, diminish their development capacity, and make development conditions more fertile for insecurity.

Democratic Republic of Congo and the Resource Curse: Globalization, Strategic Minerals, and Unequal Development

Burkina Faso is an example of globalization of insecurity, while the DRC is an example of globalization of dependence on resources. The DRC is a geostrategic country due to its abundance of strategic minerals. It has significant reserves of cobalt, coltan, copper, lithium, gold, and rare-earth minerals, which are vital to today's industrial manufacturing and the global shift to renewable energy technologies.

The strategic significance of the DRC has increased significantly in the last 20 years. Coltan and tantalum were in high demand due to the growth of mobile technologies in the early 2000s, while cobalt and lithium were in the spotlight amid the digital revolution and the growing demand from electric vehicles and renewable energy systems. The DRC currently accounts for about 70 percent of global cobalt production and is essential to battery manufacturing and the green-energy shift (United States Geological Survey, 2025).

Believe it or not, this wealth of nature has not yet resulted in the development of the entire population. Rather, the nation is among the most cited examples of the resource curse. While the country is rich in minerals, over 60 percent of the population still lives below the international poverty line, and in addition to low access to healthcare, education, clean water, and infrastructure, many mining communities suffer from these issues (World

Bank, 2024a). This contradiction poses a problem for hyperglobalist ideas that equate integration into global markets with certain benefits for development.

One explanation concerns the structure of global value chains. While the DRC is the world's top producer of cobalt, the majority of value addition takes place in other countries, such as refining, battery production, and advanced technological production. As a result, only a fraction of the benefits of the global green economy are recognized by Congolese communities. This is in line with other development patterns noted by dependency theorists, who point to the integration of peripheral economies into the world economy as suppliers of resources rather than in higher-value activities (Frank 1967; Wallerstein 1974).

Globalization has also exacerbated competition for control over resources. There are several armed groups in eastern Congo, where mineral-rich areas offer great opportunities for revenue generation from illegal mining, collection, and smuggling networks (United Nations Security Council, 2024). Conflict financing, child labour, human rights violations, and environmental degradation have long been documented by Amnesty International (2023) and the United Nations Group of Experts (2023) as concerns stemming from artisanal and industrial mining. The situation shows how an imbalance in strategic mineral extraction and distribution of benefits could trigger insecurity locally when governance institutions are unable to manage the extraction process.

Moreover, the DRC case demonstrates an important paradox in the current sustainability discourse. The adoption of renewable energy worldwide is widely seen as the path towards environmental sustainability. However, many of the minerals needed for this transition are mined in developing nations where poverty, conflict, and ecological degradation are widespread. As a result, the advantages of green globalization are not equally shared across the international system, with the rich consumers reaping green gains and the poor people paying the heavy social and environmental price.

The DRC is thus a representative case of another aspect of the globalization vulnerability perspective. Being part of global markets offers opportunities for expansion and investment, but it also raises security concerns, institutional fragility, and the risk of lasting poverty. Globalization can exacerbate, not reduce, developmental vulnerabilities without effective governance, industrial upgrading, and equitable access to global value chains.

Comparative lessons and validation of the globalization vulnerability perspective

The cases of Burkina Faso and the DRC differ significantly in their histories, economic organization, and main forms of vulnerability. However, when compared, some commonalities strongly support the globalization vulnerability perspective.

First, globalization is not happening in isolation but rather alongside pre-existing structural vulnerabilities in both cases. Digital connectivity, cross-border mobility, and transnational extremist networks exacerbated Burkina Faso's insecurity, which was compounded by low incomes, youth unemployment, and poor governance. The combination of global demand for minerals in the DRC and institutional weakness and lax regulation resulted in worsening resource conflicts and developmental inequalities. The results of the globalization process depend on domestic institutions and political agency rather than directly on globalization processes, as argued by the transformationalists (Held et al., 1999).

Second, there are unequal benefit-cost distributions in both cases. Digital connectivity, technological innovation, and access to strategic minerals benefit the global economy but harm vulnerable communities. Insecurity, displacement, and interrupted livelihoods are a reality for citizens of Burkina Faso, and poverty, environmental degradation, and conflict are a reality for the Congolese mining communities in a country that is among the richest in the world. The outcomes reflect the disparities in power relations in the current globalized world.

Thirdly, the cases show the existence of self-reinforcing vulnerability traps. Insecurity in Burkina Faso is an obstacle to development, and development deficits are an enabler of radicalization and recruitment. Resource dependence in the DRC undermines governance and strengthens conflict, and conflict undermines the diversification and strengthening of institutions. In both, they are exacerbated, not enriched, by globalization.

However, there are some differences as well. Transnational insecurity through global communication and mobility networks is the main mechanism of vulnerability in Burkina Faso, while global commodity markets and extractive value chains are the main mechanisms of vulnerability in DRC. The differences indicate multiple pathways to vulnerability created by the processes of globalization, each with its own context-dependent political, economic, and institutional dimensions.

In sum, the evidence is robust in support of the main thesis of the globalization vulnerability perspective: globalization per se is neither good nor bad. Instead, it is a multiplicative function that supercharges strengths and weaknesses. Globalization can bring many benefits in contexts of strong institutions, good governance, and inclusive development. On the other hand, globalization increases insecurity, dependency, and social exclusion in fragile states with low institutional capacity and high levels of poverty and inequality. These two situations in Burkina Faso and the DRC are therefore clear examples of the empirical need for new, more innovative, more equitable, and more locally rooted forms of integration if there is to be sustainable social transformation rather than just more integration into global systems.

Mitigation Pathways: Toward Ethical Glocalization and Sustainable Transformation

Despite the powerful aggravating mechanisms and vicious cycles outlined in Section 4, this study emphatically denies determinism. In line with the critical transformationalist and globalization vulnerability approaches, the consequences of globalization remain dependent on strategic agency, institutional innovation, and political will. The section builds on concrete, actionable mitigation pathways that will shift the dynamics of globalization from an exploitative and vulnerable experience to an effective tool for inclusive, resilient, and people-centred sustainable social change in Africa.

AfCFTA and Regional Economic Integration

AfCFTA, the most ambitious institutional answer to the structural weaknesses created by globalization in Africa, was officially launched for trading in 2021. Africa's economic integration has often occurred amid commodity dependence, discontinuous markets, indebtedness, limited industrialization, and vulnerability to external shocks. This has strengthened the conceptualization of this study of the Globalization Vulnerability Trap, which assumes that when people are not equally involved in the global system, those left behind are insecure, unequal, and underdeveloped. AfCFTA offers a strategy to address these dynamics by improving regional integration, diversifying economies, and lessening reliance on markets outside the region.

AfCFTA's transformative power lies in establishing a single continental market for a population of more than 1.4 billion people and a combined GDP of more than US\$3.4 trillion. The agreement aims to improve intra-African trade, industry competitiveness, and the development of regional value chains by removing tariff and non-tariff barriers, harmonizing trade regulations, and promoting cross-border investment. The African Export–Import Bank (Afreximbank, 2024) estimated that the implementation of AfCFTA could generate up to 15-45% growth in intra-African trade by 2045, and up to 1.2-3% to the African GDP. These projected gains are not guaranteed, however. Their reliance is on the effective implementation of tariff liberalization pledges, the reduction of non-tariff barriers (NTBs), the expansion of transport and logistics infrastructure, the harmonization of customs procedures, and political commitment from member states.

This study's results indicate that AfCFTA cannot be interpreted solely as trade liberalization, but rather as a development and security policy. Strengthened regional integration can help reduce over-dependence on external markets, lessen vulnerability to international commodity price fluctuations, and improve economic resilience to external shocks, including geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions, and financial crises. AfCFTA, through its facilitation of intra-African production and consumption, can help address some of the structural factors of insecurity outlined in Section 4, such as youth unemployment, poverty, and regional inequalities.

Emphasis on value addition in strategic sectors is very important. Africa's raw materials continue to be shipped away, while manufactured goods remain high-value, leaving Africa with only a small share of global value creation. For instance, cobalt is found in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which accounts for about 70% of global production, but has a low level of economic value added from downstream processing and manufacturing.

These trends are seen across a wide range of commodities in agriculture, energy, and mineral exports across the continent. Based on this study, the following recommendations are made: Industrialization strategies from the region should prioritize local processing, beneficiation, and manufacturing. These measures would generate jobs, expand technological capacity, strengthen domestic industries, and stabilize the money markets.

Complementary financial and institutional reforms are also needed to ensure the success of AfCFTA. The African Union and Afreximbank have developed the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), which has significant potential to reduce cross-border trade transaction costs by using local currencies. Reducing reliance on external reserve currencies would boost monetary sovereignty and regional trade efficiency. It is also imperative to invest in transport corridors, energy infrastructure, digital connectivity, and trade facilitation systems to reduce the high costs of trading across African borders.

Implementing AfCFTA should be inclusive, including specific support mechanisms for fragile states, women-led businesses, youth-led businesses, small businesses, and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) to ensure inclusive development outcomes. If integration is not explicitly sought, the benefits may be concentrated in already competitive economies and larger companies, thereby reinforcing inequalities. Inclusively implementing regional integration would enhance its potential to bring about widespread social change, rather than just selective economic benefits.

From the Globalization Vulnerability Perspective, the AfCFTA can be considered a viable tool for transforming Africa's relations with globalization. Instead of being mostly a raw-materials exporter and an importer of manufactured goods, the continent can use regional integration to boost productive capacity, strengthen regional collective bargaining power, and build resilience to external economic shocks. This means that the successful implementation of AfCFTA would help to directly achieve SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), and Agenda 2063's goal of a prosperous, integrated, and self-reliant Africa. Overall, regional integration is one of the most promising avenues to break the vulnerability trap, as identified in this study, and to shift the focus of globalization from vulnerability to equitable and sustainable development.

Technological Innovation and Digital Glocalization

Technological innovation and digital glocalization are among the most promising ways to address the challenges of globalization and put them to work in inclusive development. Africa can use digital technologies not only for integration but also for local empowerment and resilience, which are integral to the Globalization Vulnerability Perspective, this study argues.

The Kenyan M-Pesa is a world leader, providing formal financial services to about 50 million users and contributing to financial inclusion in East Africa. But, as mentioned in Section 4.1.2, it is the same digital infrastructure that is fueling inclusion, but also increases the attack surface for cybercriminals and hybrid threats. This duality highlights the pressing need for proactive, situation-based digital strategies.

The following are recommended as actionable measures for African governments/regional bodies to take:

- Scaling digital literacy and coding skills programs, with a particular focus on youth and women in fragile regions such as the Sahel, aiming for at least 50% youth digital proficiency by 2030.
- Investing in robust cybersecurity infrastructure and governance frameworks to protect critical digital systems, including mobile money platforms, from ransomware and state-sponsored attacks.
- Promoting indigenous digital innovation through targeted support for technology hubs, startups, and research institutions that adapt global technologies to local challenges—such as climate-smart agriculture applications, mobile health services, and conflict early-warning systems.

Digital glocalization, as part of AfCFTA, can help reduce the youth unemployment-extremism nexus in the Sahel and help African economies rise in the value chains in the global market. These actions contribute directly to

SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and have a positive impact on the promotion of science, technology, and innovation-based development as part of Agenda 2063.

Finally, digital glocalization needs to be about ownership, not just adoption, which means that technological innovation does not compromise African agency, sovereignty, and cultural identity.

Leveraging Remittances and Diaspora Engagement

Remittances from the African diaspora are one of the more predictable and resilient sources of development funding for Africa. The World Bank Migration and Development Brief (2024) estimates that by 2024, remittances to Sub-Saharan Africa exceeded USD 100 billion, surpassing FDI and ODA in some countries. Remittances are not influenced by donor preferences or conditions and are less sensitive to economic or political volatility than FDI. They thus contribute to poverty reduction, employment, and shocks in the outside economy.

Remittances' developmental effects extend beyond household consumption. They can facilitate education, health care, housing, and small-business development, thereby improving human capital and local economic resilience. Remittances play an important role in communities where insecurity or limited employment options prevail, helping reduce vulnerability and increase adaptive capacity.

The study suggests increasing the remittance transaction costs savings through digital payments and regulatory reforms; expanding diaspora investment funds to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs), youth entrepreneurship, and climate-resistant economic activities; and improving mechanisms for skills and technology transfer to maximize developmental impact. In addition to financial resources, diasporas are a source of knowledge, creativity, and global connections that can be tapped for institutional development and sustainable development.

Remittances and diaspora engagement, viewed through the lens of the globalization vulnerability perspective, are pragmatic tools for reducing reliance on external funding sources and enhancing community resilience. These can help to shift the financial and human resources needed to escape the vulnerability trap observed across this study and support SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and the vision of a prosperous and self-reliant Africa in Agenda 2063.

Participatory Glocalization and Pan-African Solidarity

Ethical glocalization - the deliberate, locally owned adaptation of global processes, norms, and technologies to African cultural, institutional, and ecological contexts - is at the heart of sustainable social transformation. This research argues that glocalization is not only a technical shift but also a political and epistemological endeavor, a response to the epistemic injustice and cultural erosion observed in section 4.2.

This study recommends the following practical actions:

- Institutionalizing participatory SDG localization and Agenda 2063 implementation processes that genuinely incorporate community voices, traditional authorities, youth, women, and indigenous knowledge systems.
- Strengthening Pan-African solidarity through coordinated negotiating positions in global forums, joint investment in regional infrastructure, and mutual support mechanisms for fragile states.
- Promoting South-South cooperation and intra-African knowledge exchange to reduce dependence on Northern-dominated development models.

Glocalization can help ensure that globalization serves human dignity and collective resilience rather than reinforcing hierarchies by focusing on African agency, values (such as *ubuntu* and communal solidarity), and priorities.

Synthesis of Mitigation Pathways

The pathways elaborated in this section are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary and interdependent. They respond together to the particular aggravating mechanisms and empirical facts analyzed in Section 4, such as the Sahel polycrisis and the DRC resource curse.

Table 5.1: Glocalization Mitigation Framework

Challenge (Section 4):	Key Strategy	Primary Actors	Measurable Target by 2030	SDG & Agenda 2063 Linkage
Terrorism & Youth Unemployment (Sahel)	AfCFTA + Digital Youth Jobs	AU, Governments, Tech Sector	25% reduction in Sahel youth unemployment	SDG 8, 16
Resource Curse (DRC)	Local Value Addition & Due Diligence	Governments, Multinationals, AU	30% increase in local mineral processing	SDG 9, 10, 12
Polycrisis Triad (Debt, Corruption, Climate)	Debt Relief + Climate Finance + Governance Reform	AU, UN, G20	20% increase in fiscal space for social investment	SDG 13, 16, 17
Digital & Cultural Vulnerabilities	Cybersecurity + Participatory Glocalization	Governments, Civil Society, Diaspora	National cybersecurity strategies in 40+ countries	SDG 9, 16

This integrated approach shifts globalization from an engine of division and exploitation toward a vehicle for collective equity, human dignity, and planetary resilience.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that, to a certain extent, globalization exacerbates the crises of international security and social development, especially in structurally vulnerable settings in sub-Saharan Africa. Using a critical transformationalist approach and the Globalization Vulnerability Perspective developed in this paper, the analysis shows how open digital networks, extractive global value chains, debt dependencies, and flows of culture come together to establish self-reinforcing cycles of insecurity, inequality, and institutional fragility. These dynamics are clearly brought to life in the case of the Sahel polycrisis and the DRC resource curse; globalization increases rather than diminishes vulnerability in fragile states.

The results run counter not only to the hyperglobalist optimism, but also to the pure pessimism of pure skeptics. This study also identifies the deep imbalances and distributive shortcomings that may hinder efforts to achieve the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063, despite the overall positive global impacts of achieving these goals, including poverty alleviation and technological diffusion. The security-development relationship is interdependent, and so is the polycrisis, with the three domains of corruption, debt, and climate vulnerability—all of which are so strong that they cannot be reduced by individual action.

But this study strongly rejects determinism. The effects of globalization depend on strategic agency, institutional innovation, and collective political will. The mitigation pathways presented in Section 5 – accelerated regional integration via AfCFTA, digital glocalization, leveraged remittances, multilateral reforms, and participatory ethical glocalization – provide a coherent and actionable roadmap to break the vulnerability trap. The strategies are grounded in empirical evidence from both the Sahel and DRC scenarios and call for African ownership, Pan-African solidarity, and the adaptation of global forces to local priorities.

This research brings a novel, Africa-inspired analytical framework that combines theory and policy-relevant insights. It invites African governments, regional institutions, civil society, the African diaspora, and the international community to put the value of human dignity, equity, and planetary resilience at the heart of globalization, and to shift its focus from an instrument of exploitation and division.

This change requires a concerted effort and a sense of urgency. Achieving Agenda 2063's vision of a peaceful, prosperous, integrated, and self-reliant Africa is both a continental goal and an integral part of a more peaceful and prosperous world. The risks are great, yet so are the possibilities in Africa, as this study has demonstrated. With strategic action and ethical conduct, the continent can tap into the tremendous energy of globalization and use it for the good of its youthful population and future generations.

REFERENCES

1. African Development Bank. (2020). Illicit financial flows and economic development in Africa. African Development Bank.
2. African Export–Import Bank. (2024). African trade report 2024: Climate implications of the AfCFTA implementation. Afreximbank.
3. African Union Commission. (2024). African Continental Free Trade Area Implementation Progress Report. African Union.
4. African Union Commission. (2024). Agenda 2063: Second ten-year implementation plan (2024–2033). African Union.
5. Amnesty International. (2023). The state of the world's human rights 2023/24. Amnesty International.
6. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. Sage.
7. Fanon, F. (1961). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.
8. Food and Agriculture Organization. (2024). Regional overview of food security and nutrition in Africa 2024. FAO.
9. Frank, A. G. (1967). *Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical studies of Chile and Brazil*. Monthly Review Press.
10. Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford University Press.
11. Gurr, T. R. (1970). *Why men rebel*. Princeton University Press.
12. Held, D., McGrew, A., Goldblatt, D., & Perraton, J. (1999). *Global transformations: Politics, economics, and culture*. Stanford University Press.
13. Institute for Economics and Peace. (2024). *Global terrorism index 2024: Measuring the impact of terrorism*. Institute for Economics and Peace.
14. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2023). *Climate change 2023: Synthesis report*. IPCC.
15. Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. (1998). *Power and interdependence* (2nd ed.). Longman.
16. Mariotti, S. (2025). Globalization, geopolitical tensions, and economic fragmentation. *Journal of Industrial and Business Economics*, 52(1), 1–15.
17. Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. W. W. Norton & Company.
18. Oxfam International. (2024). *Inequality Inc.: How corporate power divides our world and the need for a new era of public action*. Oxfam International.
19. Sachs, J. D. (2024). *Sustainable development report 2024*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
20. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
21. Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
22. Stiglitz, J. E. (2002). *Globalization and its discontents*. W. W. Norton & Company.
23. Transparency International. (2025). *Corruption Perceptions Index 2025*. Transparency International.
24. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2024). *Economic development in Africa report 2024: Unlocking Africa's trade potential*. United Nations.
25. United Nations Development Programme. (2023). *Journey to extremism in Africa: Pathways to recruitment and disengagement*. UNDP.
26. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (2023). *Economic report on Africa 2023: Advancing the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area*. United Nations.
27. United Nations Environment Programme. (2024). *Africa adaptation gap report 2024*. UNEP.

28. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2024). Global trends: Forced displacement in 2024. UNHCR.
29. United Nations Population Fund. (2024). State of World Population 2024. UNFPA.
30. United Nations Security Council. (2024). Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo. United Nations.
31. United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. United Nations.
32. United States Geological Survey. (2025). Mineral commodity summaries 2025: Cobalt. U.S. Department of the Interior.
33. Wallerstein, I. (1974). The modern world-system: Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century. Academic Press.
34. Waltz, K. N. (1979). Theory of international politics. Addison-Wesley.
35. World Bank. (2020). The African Continental Free Trade Area: Economic and distributional effects. World Bank.
36. World Bank. (2022). Poverty and shared prosperity 2022: Correcting course. World Bank.
37. World Bank. (2024a). Migration and development brief 41: Remittances slowed in 2024, expected to grow faster in 2025. World Bank.
38. World Bank. (2024b). Poverty, prosperity, and planet report 2024: Pathways out of the polycrisis. World Bank.
39. World Economic Forum. (2025). The Global Risks Report 2025. World Economic Forum.