



Engaging Higher Academic Institutions in African Peace and Security Affairs: What Can We Learn from African Vice-Chancellors' Debate in 2015?

Mesfin Gebremichael

Executive Summary

Africa has several security challenges. Among others, the main ones are related to management of diversity, illegal migration, human trafficking, and illicit financial flow. These security problems have not only contributed to civil wars and humanitarian crises in the continent, but also resulted in terrorism which has become a common security threat throughout the world. To address such kinds of security problems, it requires a coordinated action of all countries, regional and international organizations, and civil societies. The Tana High Level Forum on Security in Africa contributes towards a coordinated action because it is an informal setting of state leaders that discusses pressing continental security problems every year. Moreover, academic institutions also play a major role because these are the institutions that train scholars and experts who deal with security issues.

Key Points

- ❖ Establish an African-level Council of Vice-Chancellors (VCs) for peace and security studies.
- ❖ Establish a Secretariat Office in one of the participant universities to support the work of the Council.
- ❖ Increase the number of participant VCs and students from different universities and countries in the Tana High-Level Forum (THLF).
- ❖ Diversify the pre-forum events of THLF.
- ❖ Conduct further researches on the agenda of THLF and disseminate the findings to the academic community of the universities and other end users.

Introduction

The Tana High-Level Forum (THLF) for security in Africa is an informal setting of state leaders that debates on the continent's most pressing security challenges. The Forum, since its inception in April 2012, has discussed several security and political issues: managing diversity and state fragility in Africa, security and organized crime in Africa, impact of illicit financial flows on peace and security in Africa and politicization of faith and secularism in Africa. Many state leaders, representatives of international and regional organizations and civil societies have participated in the debates. The number of participants has increased from 90 in 2012 to 250 in 2015.

The Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa, in conjunction with Bahir Dar University organized Vice-Chancellors' (VCs) debate on the main agenda of the forum as a pre-forum event. Six VCs, one each from South Sudan, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, and South Africa and two from Ethiopia participated in the debate. Primarily, they discussed the agenda for the year (The Politicization of Faith and Secularism) in the context of Africa and also exchanged views on the same with members of the academic community from Bahir Dar University. This policy briefing paper summarizes the main security challenges that are relevant in terms of engaging African universities in African peace and security issues. It also draws lessons from the VCs' debate of 2015 and proposes an establishment of African Universities VCs' Network to enhance the role of African universities in security matters of the Continent.

African Security Challenges

Most African countries are multi-ethnic. They have diverse identities in terms of religion, culture, ethnicity, language and social group. However, poor management or

total exclusion of the identity groups from the benefits of state resources has become a challenge to African security. This created a situation where control over the state has turned out to be the main mechanism for allocating national wealth. In order to get hold of state control, the struggle, on the other hand, resulted in a number of costly secessionist wars, communal violence, identity-based conflicts and civil wars in many parts of Africa. For example, in the last century, lack of equal access to state resources caused bloody rebel movements against the states of Ethiopia and the Sudan, among others. Furthermore, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the massacre in Burundi, the Tuareg uprising in Mali, the fighting among clans in Somalia and Liberia, the warfare by Berbers against the ruling Arab clan in Algeria, and the ongoing South Sudan conflict are some examples of identity-based conflicts.¹ Such problems have resulted in unconstitutional change of governments in many African countries.²

Another security challenge to Africa is illegal migration and human trafficking. Citizens migrate to get better employment opportunities and to run away from bad governance and insecurity in their own countries. In addition, environmental factors and health problems have caused increase in migration and human trafficking from African countries to other countries.³ For example, according to the 2012 Annual Report of the State Department, there were more than 10,000 identified human trafficking only from Africa.⁴ However, the problem is not only the magnitude; it is also that the issue is not discussed from the African perspectives, interests, and ways of addressing conflicts.

Illicit financial flow from Africa to the West is also one of the African security challenges. It is reported that the cumulative outflow between 1980 and 2009 ranges from USD 1.2 trillion to USD 1.4 trillion. This is an amount which exceeds what Africa gets in

development assistance and foreign direct investment.⁵ The outflow contributes to unbalanced trade relationship between the North and the South. Africa exports primary products and imports manufacturing machineries and IT services at much higher prices. This has placed the continent at the bottom order of the global trade relationship.

The above problems have contributed to humanitarian crisis and terrorism in Africa. According to the UN reports, most of the humanitarian crises are related to armed conflicts and systematic human rights violations of governments to their citizens.⁶ Humanitarian crises in some African countries including Mali, Libya, Central African Republic, Sudan and Eritrea are related to the above factors. Identity-based conflicts in conjunction with lack of employment opportunities and other security problems cause proliferation of terrorist groups such as Al Shabab in Somalia and Boko Haram in Nigeria.

Addressing African Security Challenges through Collective Action

Africa needs to invest in its peace and security matters to get focused on its development priorities. The investment can take different dimensions. The first is to sensitise the stakeholders. This includes creating a consensus among state leaders, civil society organizations and academic institutions. For this, the common security issues/priorities such as management of diversity, identity-based conflicts, inter-state conflicts, illicit financial flow, religious extremism and terrorism should be discussed and debated among different stakeholders at continental and regional levels. Moreover, Africans should have diverse mechanisms which help them to realize their own

way of looking at African security priorities. The Tana High-Level Forum for Security in Africa is one of the mechanisms. Other stakeholders including African universities can organize similar platforms.

The second is to create institutional capacity for collaborative continental action. This requires mobilization of resources through regional and continental institutions for collaborative action. However, these institutions have some capacity related deficiencies. For example, the AU has little bureaucratic capacity to keep the organization working effectively and efficiently along the increasing demands for intervention.⁷ Its member states are often divided over how to respond to Africa's conflicts. Moreover, although the UN Charter gives a significant role to regional organizations like AU, there are a lot of unclear things with regard to how the strategic partnership should be strengthened between UN and AU, for example⁸. Reorganizing and redefining the role of continental institutions and RECs in a way that increases their efficiency and establishing new institutions such as network of universities could contribute to the enhancement of continental action.

The Role of Higher Academic Institutions

Universities are instruments of soft power and hard power that influence the behaviour and actions of states.⁹ Academic institutions deal with human capital. Dealing with human capital refers not only to transmitting basic knowledge and the necessary skills to the young generation but also training experts who can influence policy decision making and implementation of policies by state institutions. Universities can generate knowledge and develop it into the global and local mainstream knowledge.

This is because universities in Africa are relatively well connected with local communities, regional and international research and academic institutions. Moreover, these universities have multi-national academic communities. This enables them to generate, test and disseminate new ideas which can contribute to African peace and security.

Universities can also create awareness by organizing debates among different stakeholders around the contemporary security challenges. This can be done, for example, by enabling VCs to debate with each other. A good example of this is the VCs' debate organized in association with the fourth round of THLF agenda - Politicization of Faith and Secularization in Africa. VCs, who were also participants in the THLF, were invited to debate the agenda of the THLF before the state leaders' debate started. The debate of the VCs was also attended by academic staff and students from Bahir Dar University. There are several lessons that can be drawn from the VCs' debate of 2015. These include:

❖ **Engaging and sensitising university students on African security problems**

The VCs' debate was very useful in engaging and sensitising university students on the contemporary African security problems. The debate created a good opportunity for the students to listen directly to how the VCs and former state leaders conceptualize the contemporary security challenges of Africa in general and of different countries in particular. For example, the former Nigerian president explained that Boko Haram was established by and made up of a group of unemployed people in the areas where it is now active. In fact, the name Boko Haram is directly associated with the existence of unemployed persons in the specific place.¹⁰ So, terrorism may not necessarily be a result of religious fundamentalism and

extremism; it can be a result of grievances related to economic problems, marginalization, inequalities and lack of justice which are all structural security challenges in Africa. Moreover, the students were able to interact with moderate Islam leaders and this helped them to get clarification on how the moderate Islam scholars and political party leaders understand the relationship between Islam and democracy in countries such as Tunisia.¹¹

❖ **Adapting western concepts to the context of Africa**

The debate helped students to see how VCs from different African universities conceptualize politicization of faith and their views on whether or not secularization of the state can be a best solution in Africa. Some of the students and scholars challenged the concept of secularism and argued that secularism is not a new concept and not a necessary condition to religious tolerance in Africa. They contended that secularism, although a term not commonly used in Africa, has been part of the traditional practices of most African communities and has helped the people to be religion-tolerant in their relationship with each other. In addition, people from different religions are connected in all social, economic and political activities. Therefore, instead of focusing on the concept of secularism, it was said that we have to explore why some communities in Africa and the institutions that allow religious practices are more religion-tolerant. Therefore, engaging VCs of different African academic institutions in face to face discussions helped them to see the relevance of further studies on the concept of secularism in the context of Africa.

❖ **Preparing young students for global changes and risk management**

The attendance and debate of the VCs at Tana High-Level Security Forum was useful to prepare young university students for identifying future continental-level developmental priorities and managing risks associated with globalization and economic development. For example, it became clear that the existence of weak regional infrastructure and non-integrated economic development at regional and continental level creates an unfavourable condition for fragile states that cannot provide public goods and security services to their citizens.¹² Thus, the VCs' debate enabled them to think about why Africa needs to invest on regional infrastructures that link not only countries in the regions but also the regions to each other.

Moreover, the debates helped the VCs to think why Africa needs to cope with the third industrial revolution that primarily depends on renewable energy resources.¹³ This is because the world has started abandoning the use of fossil-based sources of energy. The last G7 summit decided to replace, by the end of this century, such sources of energy by renewable ones. Hence, Africa should start developing its renewable energy and attract FDI by supplying cheap green energy to emerge as an economic power in the 21st century. Moreover, Africa needs to create a free economic trade zone to correct the unbalanced trade relationship that caused illicit financial flow to the West. Therefore, the participation of the VCs in the THLF was very useful to prepare universities and their young students to play a role in mitigating future security challenges and exploiting opportunities for economic development.

❖ Influencing priorities of universities

The VCs' debate was also instrumental to influence the priorities of universities such as curriculum development and research area identification. The VCs discussed the role that universities can play in addressing the problem of politicization of faith at universities through curriculum development, training, researches and various clubs that encourage the commonalities of different faiths. The debate was also useful to see the importance of collaborative efforts among universities and continental and regional institutions. This is because the regional institutions are expected to solve problems and deliver concrete results that produce positive changes in people's lives.

❖ Creating continental networks

The VCs' debate was also very useful to create networks between themselves and other international and regional organizations. As noted above, the debate was organized along the informal setting of state leaders' dialogue. Hence, the VCs got opportunities to discuss informally with several heads of state and representatives of regional and international organizations. For example, among the 250 participants of the last THLF there were two vice presidents, five heads of state, eight former heads of state, one prime minister and forty members of media. This means that the THLF has created opportunities for VCs to discuss several issues with prominent personalities in the Continent. Such types of opportunities can support academic institutions to strengthen their contacts, which, in turn, help them to mobilize resources that are useful for further research engagements.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There are different mechanisms to sustain the continuity of the VCs' debates. The first step is to institutionalise the setting of the debate. To date, there is no institutional set-up of African universities that focuses on African peace and security issues. Hence, VCs' network is required to contribute to that process. For this, a council of VCs should be established which will be chaired by one of the VCs on a yearly or two years-appointment-basis. The council will discuss

common security research agenda and also contribute to the agenda setting of the Tana High-Level Security Forum. It organizes a team of scholars that facilitates the process and works in close collaboration with the secretariat of the council that will be established in one of the member universities. The team of scholars organizes researches on common security agendas of the universities and disseminates findings to the academic communities using journals and other mechanisms. It also supports the VCs to contribute to the debates with each other and with the state leaders.

Activities	Who does it?
African Universities Peace and Security Efforts	
Organize a Council of VCs from those who participated in the last THLF.	The VCs from Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa
Establish a Secretariat office.	One of the universities whose VC participated in the last THLF
Establish a team of scholars.	The VCs who participated in the last THLF
Develop a concept note that contributes to the establishment process of African-level VCs' Council.	The Secretariat and the team of scholars
Establish an African-level council for peace and security studies.	African universities which have Peace and Security Studies Departments/ Institutes
Conduct further researches on African peace and security and disseminate the findings to the academic communities of the universities.	The council of the universities

Tana High-Level Security Forum	
Increase the number of participant VCs and students from different universities and regions of the continent.	The secretariat of THLF
Make preparations for better participation in THLF.	The council of universities
Disseminate the discussion points of THLF to academic communities of African universities.	The council of universities
Diversify the pre-forum events of THLF.	The secretariat of THLF

In conclusion, the VCs' dialogue is an instrument to bring the common African security challenges to the attention of the young scholars and state leaders. Hence, engaging VCs in the debates of the THLF will be useful in the future. For this purpose, creating a VCs' network as well as secretariat office will be relevant. To facilitate the process of establishment of the network, a concept note has to be distributed to potential member universities. More VCs have to be invited to the next THLF forum to encourage the participation of African universities in African security matters.

¹ Report on the First Tana High-level Forum on Security in Africa, 14-15 April 2012, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, available at: <http://tanaforum.org/>

² Williams, P.D (2011) The African Union's Conflict Management Capabilities, available at: <http://www.cfr.org/>

³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), Global figures, as of November 2014 available at: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/global-figures>

⁴ United States State Department, June 2012 Report on Trafficking in Persons: available at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/192587.pdf>

⁵ Report on the 3rd Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa, 26-27 April 2014, Bahir DDr, Ethiopia, available at: <http://tanaforum.org/>

⁶ UN enquiry reports gross human rights violations in Eritrea, June 8, 2015, available at: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColEritrea/A_HRC_29_CRP-1.pdf

⁷ Williams, P.D (2011) 'The African Union's Conflict Management Capabilities', available at: <http://www.cfr.org/>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Nye, J. S.(2011) The Future of Power, New York: BBS Publications

¹⁰ Deliberations made by H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo, the former President of Nigeria at the Fourth THLF

¹¹ Presentation made by H.E. Rashid al-Ghannoushi, President of the Ennahdha Movement, Tunisia

¹² Gebremichael, M. (2014) 'American Engagement in IGAD Countries', Available at: <http://www.itd-amherst.org/>

¹³ Rifkin, J.(2011) The Third Industrial Revolution: How Lateral Power is Transforming the Economy and the World, Macmillan: Palgrave

About the Author

Mesfin Gebremichael, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at the Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Addis Ababa University.

About IPSS

The Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) of Addis Ababa University is a premier higher learning and research institution on peace and security studies. IPSS and APSP pursue the mission to promote peace and security in Ethiopia and Africa at large through education and professional development and research and policy dialogues. The Africa Peace and Security Programme (APSP) is a joint programme of the African Union (AU) and Institute for Peace and Security Studies of Addis

Ababa University, mandated by the African Union's executive Council to take up the intellectual challenge of finding African-led solutions to peace and security in Africa.

The six page IPSS Policy Brief aim is to provide succinct policy recommendations on topical and relevant issues related to the wider African peace, security and governance. The IPSS Policy Brief is written by senior academic and senior researchers of the IPSS. The IPSS Policy Brief is also written by PhD candidates and MA students of the IPSS.

<http://www.ipss-addis.org>

Enquiries concerning reproduction or dissemination of this paper should be addressed to research@ipss-addis.org

The opinions expressed in this volume are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

© 2015, Institute for Peace and Security Studies
Copy-editing by IPSS
Design and typesetting by IPSS

This paper was published by the Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia (IPSS). The opinions expressed in this volume are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia
