Policy Brief
Governance and the State of Public Service Delivery in East Africa and the Horn of Africa Region: Impact on Peace and Security

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This paper builds on the pre-recorded policy conversation on Governance and the provision of public social services in East Africa and the Horn of Africa region, moderated by Dr. Gilbert M. Khadiagala, with the following discussants: Dr. Chido Samantha Mutangadura, Research Consultant, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Pretoria, South Africa; Dr. Emmaculate Asige Liaga, research fellow at the Institute of Pan African Thought and Conversation (IPATC), University of Johannesburg and formerly an Associate post-doctoral researcher at the Center for African Studies, University of Basel, Graduate Institute, Geneva; Dr. Siyabulela Mandela, Regional Project Manager for East and Southern Africa with Journalists for Human Rights (JHR); and Ms. Sokhna Ndiaye, Conflict Analysis and Sensitivity Specialist for a project in the Liptako Gourma region with the Danish Refugee Council.

The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials or Member States. The ideas in this paper have been informed by ongoing research and experience by the experts in their individual capacities and contributed to the OSAA Knowledge Network. The Network creates a platform for the Office to engage with academics, experts, and think tanks, and seeks to bring visibility to the work of the experts on the UN global stage.

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Executive Summary

East Africa has been the fastest growing economic region on the continent in recent years, despite the drop in 2020 due to the economic fallout of the global pandemic. The Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) has recorded some gains in the region’s human development scores which have accompanied this economic growth. However, states in East Africa and the Horn remain fragile due to pockets of insecurity in the region and the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the situational analysis conducted in this paper points to a mixed picture of the state of governance and service delivery. The paper notes that the region’s leaders increasingly recognize the importance of integrating local government systems and private-public partnerships to improve public services. This has increased the rate of urbanization and improved the number of educational openings and access to various facilities.

On the other hand, various challenges face the region and limit its ability to develop. Access to clean water, sanitation, urban housing and health facilities remains limited. Additionally, the region’s governance challenges are evident in the trends towards authoritarian regression and the militarization of politics. This paper links East Africa and the Horn of Africa’s governance and service delivery challenges to the region’s chronic insecurity and instability. The region is plagued by protests, insurgency and low-intensity communal conflicts, creating a vicious cycle where the destruction of infrastructure from violence and mass displacement affects access to services. Hence, the paper concludes with recommendations for establishing and improving inclusive governance processes, while also improving service delivery, enhancing security sector governance, and clarifying the linkages between governance/service delivery and conflict.
Introduction

In the 1990s, a wave of institutional reforms hit most of Africa, due to pressures both from the international community and from within the continent. African countries, particular those in East Africa and the Horn of Africa, had no choice but to implement structural reforms, which resulted in reduced spending on basic public social services, which unfortunately exacerbated widespread poverty, illiteracy, and in some cases, the proliferation of ethnic conflicts. Renewed efforts are now being made by countries in the region, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, to invest in social protection and safety nets by increasing access to basic services, enhancing the efficiency of service delivery and improving the overall quality of services.

These public services range from security and justice to business services to private citizens. They also include traditional public services such as education, healthcare, housing, clean water and sanitation and administrative services, including delivery of licenses. Thus, service delivery refers to any contact with the public administration where citizens or businesses seek or provide data and handle their affairs. Good service delivery requires the government to understand the need to provide a citizen-oriented administration, including coherent policy objectives and practices through various regulatory mechanisms to promote quality and accessibility. Therefore, the State holds an essential role in delivering its public and basic services to its citizens.

Unfortunately, governance and service delivery challenges persist despite efforts from African governments and inter-governmental organizations on the continent. The African Governance Report indicates contradictory trends in service delivery. For instance, expansion of access to education in primary school in Uganda to almost 90% is accompanied by deteriorating quality of education with only 48% of learners between the ages 9-11 having basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Governance and service delivery challenges also negatively impact the relationship between the State and
citizens. An Afrobarometer survey held in February 2020 reported that in 18 African countries, including in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, only 49% of respondents believed that governments used tax revenue to provide social services to citizens. These negative perceptions of how tax revenue is used, in turn, motivate tax avoidance.\(^5\)

This paper seeks to examine the state of governance and service delivery in the countries highlighted in Figure 1 below: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

In a general overview, the region’s peace and security challenges could broadly be summarized as terrorism, inter-communal violence and intra-state conflict.

The conditions of poverty, the challenges to meet basic human needs, maladministration, corruption and the lack of proper inclusive measures to address the ethnic diversity of the region increase the likelihood of violent conflict. The drivers are linked to governance, whether the search for, the conquest and destabilization of power, or the federalism systems or self-determination, or questions of belonging and access to resources.

A vicious circle is thus created since the factors that create these dynamics are also influenced by them, a boomerang effect.
Situational Assessment

According to the African Development Bank, East Africa and the Horn of Africa has experienced promising economic growth despite the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic growth rate of the region was 0.7%. The economic growth has been accompanied by some gains in the region’s human development scores according to the IIAG. The IIAG’s human development scores are based on health, education, social protection and environmental sustainability.

Figure 2 in the following page indicates that states in the region have shown improvements in their human development scores, aside from Eritrea. The IIAG’s index does not have information on South Sudan.

Despite the advances illustrated in this figure, East Africa and the Horn of Africa’s human development scores are largely a reflection of the region’s low base. Consequently, despite the recorded improvements, most of the countries in this area are still in the low human development category, according to the 2020 Human Development Index, with the exception of Kenya. This means that the region continues to face some human development challenges which are indicated in the host of security challenges the region faces. These challenges range from democratic decline, violent extremism, high rates of poverty, and lack of access to public services such as clean water and sanitation, availability of adequate housing, access to quality healthcare and education.
FIGURE 2: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT SCORES FOR EAST AFRICA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

ADOBE STOCK | SUNSHINE SEEDS
Authoritarian Regression

The Economist Intelligence Unit’s (EIU) 2022 Democracy Index\textsuperscript{11} classifies Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania as hybrid regimes and Eritrea, Djibouti and Sudan as authoritarian regimes\textsuperscript{12}. The region’s failure to achieve democratic consolidation fuels political violence because of the subsequent negative impacts on governance and state-citizen relations. Moreover, East Africa and the Horn of Africa’s governance scores have declined across the region\textsuperscript{13}. The decline is related to the simultaneous deterioration of three of the four IIAG categories: participation, rights and inclusion, security and rule of law.

One of the consequences of the region’s failures to achieve democratic consolidation is the recent prevalence of political systems characterized by one-party dominance. Djibouti, Eritrea, and Uganda are regional examples of countries where the ruling parties have been in power for over two decades.

Additionally, other signs of the region’s declining governance scores are clear from the rise of presidential term extensions through questionable constitutional manipulation. Since 2015, the heads of State in Uganda and South Sudan, for example, have extended their terms through legislative instruments. Such term extensions are part of a broader trend across the region which have seen leaders circumvent constitutional checks and balances. Incumbents circumventing constitutional limits and extending their stay in power is an indication that some countries in the region are struggling with democratic consolidation.
The Militarization of Politics

Several countries in the region exemplify the negative implications of military actors being highly involved in political and government affairs. This prominence of military or security actors in national politics drives the militarization of politics. The militarization of politics in the region is driven partly by the existence of political parties that have their roots as rebel movements. Former rebel movements are currently the ruling parties in Uganda, Eritrea, and South Sudan. A coup d’état, such as in Sudan’s case in 2019, is another pathway to militarized politics.

The security sector in militarized political systems acts as a source of instability and insecurity and affects provision of service delivery. Some argue that the presence of former rebel movements in political systems has negative implications for democratic consolidation. It might lead to one-party states, such as the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) in Eritrea.

Militarization prioritizes the use of military-oriented solutions to governance problems, a desirable option for African regimes that are unwilling to practice inclusive governance. The tendency to prioritize military responses to governance issues becomes a serious challenge where ethnic divisions exist within the security sector. The rising militarization in countries in this region has unintended consequences on the States’ ability to provide security and stability and ensure consistent provision of public and basic social services for their citizenry.

Additionally, the security sectors in militarized political systems receive a large proportion of government expenditure. According to Statista, five of the countries in East Africa and the Horn of Africa are in the top 20 African countries with the highest defense spending budget of 2021, with Sudan being the highest spender in the region with an annual budget of US$4 million. Disproportionately high spending on the security sector negatively impacts the government’s budgetary support for other social services such as health, education, housing, clean water and sanitation and infrastructure development.
In most parts of Africa, reforms have been conducted that include the devolution of public authority, resources, and management to local governments; encouragement of private-public partnerships; and the participation of different stakeholders, including civil society, NGOs and donors. The East Africa and Horn of Africa region is no exception to this trend with the Constitutions and development plans of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, South Sudan and Ethiopia containing provisions for devolution.

Devolution efforts in East Africa and Horn have produced uneven results across the region. On the one hand Kenya and Uganda made concerted efforts through two tier and three tier government systems, respectively. Kenya’s 2010 Constitution guides the devolution of State authority between the central government and 47 county governments. In Uganda public services rely significantly on the delivery of public services at the municipal level, primarily the district councils. The primary rationale of this approach is to empower the lowest level in the administration, and actively empower the people to decide on the services that they judge necessary. Finally, the people should decide their local priorities in the allocation of resources.

Despite having policy frameworks in place, challenges in decentralizing authority remain. For example, the intergovernmental fiscal transfers in Kenya are reportedly not adequate to meet local expenditure and disbursements are often late, complicating budgetary support for local authorities. Additionally, the devolution arrangements in South Sudan and Ethiopia have failed to resolve some political tensions. For example, Ethiopia, which is divided into 10 regional governments, based on ethnic affiliations, has struggled to contain tensions between the central government and regional governments. These tensions contributed to the violent escalation between the central government and the Tigray region. If not well managed and local administrations are not well empowered with adequate resources, it becomes a challenge for them to provide the public and basic social services to their respective constituents.
East Africa and Horn of Africa’s increasing rate of urbanization in the past two decades has outstripped the ability of urban centers to provide housing for growing urban populations. Figure 3 below from Statista compares the rate of urbanization across the region\(^2\). 

As the figure shows, Uganda and South Sudan have the fastest growing urban populations in East Africa and the Horn of Africa\(^2\). On the other hand, Djibouti has the lowest growth rate however the country is the most urbanized in the region with 78% of its population living in urban areas, as of 2020\(^{22}\).

High rates of urbanization mean that access to decent housing is becoming a real issue. As a result, East Africa and the Horn of Africa has experienced the growth and explosion of informal and unplanned settlements commonly referred to as slums or informal settlements. The emergence of slums is a direct consequence of the demographic

![Figure 3: Annual Growth Rate of Urbanization in East Africa and the Horn of Africa from 2000 to 2018](source: Statista - Annual growth rate of Urbanization in East Africa and the Horn of Africa, 2000-2018)
changes, difficulties in accessing land and the high cost of developing infrastructure.

According to Statista by 2018, 35 million people in East Africa lived in slums, with Ethiopia representing a large portion of this figure with a total slum population of 14 million\textsuperscript{23}. On the other hand, Kenya has one of the most populated (per square kilometer) slums globally, Kibera in the south of Nairobi\textsuperscript{24}. If a third of Africa’s urban dwellers live in “slums”\textsuperscript{25}, what will happen when the populations of African cities triple by 2050?

And what will happen to the quality of social housing, which is already a significant issue, as well as its isolation and distance from urban centers? For the latter and the slums, there are other challenges related to access to services, notably health care, drinking water and sanitation services, and even education.
Access to Water and Sanitation

Africa is struggling to achieve SDG 6 on ensuring the availability and sustainable management of clean water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for all. Across the continent, only 54% live in areas with piped water, and only 26% of Africans live in places with sewage systems and overall around 4.5 billion people lack access to adequate sanitation. East Africa and the Horn of Africa is no exception to the general water and sanitation challenges. Indeed, universal coverage of water and sanitation services is far from being achieved. Eighty-seven percent of Ugandans and 81% of Sudanese stated that they had to leave their compounds to access clean water.

While in some areas, it is the management or treatment of wastewater, particularly access to on-site sanitation, that is of concern, in others, it is the establishment of quasi-primary needs such as basic toilet wells. Uganda’s 2020 Ministry of Water and Environment’s Sector Performance Report noted that only 39.2% of urban dwellers and 7.1% or rural dwellers had access to safely managed sanitation which hygienically separates human excreta from human contact. Between the challenges related to climatic aspects, the demographic boom, the lack of equity in policies and the insufficiency of investments, the lack of access to water and sanitation poses several issues related to its repercussions on health and the economy and the environment.

Given the high costs of inadequate water and sanitation facilities, governments in the region have promoted infrastructure development in this area. The urban versus rural disparities represent another aspect of East Africa and the Horn of Africa’s water and sanitation challenges. For example, according to the WaterAid’s East Africa and the Horn of Africa Regional Strategy, Tanzania’s expanding water and sanitation coverage has not extended to rural populations.
Access to Education

East Africa and the Horn of Africa have several countries with sound education systems, although challenges remain. On the positive side, several of the countries in East Africa and the Horn of Africa enjoy high rates of primary school enrollment. According to the World Bank and UNICEF, the region recorded net primary enrollment rates represented in Figure 4 on the next page.

As this figure indicates, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia were the region’s top performers in primary school enrollment in the pre-COVID period due to targeted policy interventions. Overall, Kenya is among the countries in the region with the most advanced education systems. Kenya, in particular, beyond the policy carried out since independence, free education at the primary and secondary levels has contributed to the exponential evolution of the education system. Uganda also managed to achieve high primary school enrollment rates when it abolished primary school fees and increased budget allocation for education in 2007 under the Universal Primary Education policy.

Unfortunately, the region experiences significantly lower secondary school enrollment even in the top performing countries. For instance, UNICEF recorded Kenya’s net enrollment rate for secondary school in 2020 at 71% compared to 99% primary school enrollment rate. The situation is even more bleak in Djibouti, Ethiopia and South Sudan which recorded net secondary school enrollment rates of 37.82%, 30.8% and 5.48%, respectively, according to the World Bank.

Additionally, the region continues to struggle with inadequate resources, the impact of instability and the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. The question of access to education poses, beyond the policies and systems put in place, several challenges related to social inequalities, particularly the household’s standard of living, the gender equality dimension, and the geographical, security or migratory situation of the people. A key indicator of the region’s lack of educational resources is the high average pupil-teacher ratio. For instance, the Kenya’s national average ratio is 56.57 learners per teacher, while in Turkana County the ratio is as high as 77 learners per teacher.

Insecurity, protests and the presence of insurgent groups also affect access to education. Somalia and South Sudan...
are the region’s two States which have struggled with instability which has impacted the country’s enrollment rate. In both countries less than 50% of school aged children attend primary school, and the secondary school attendance are even more concerning with both Somalia and South Sudan recording less than 10%\textsuperscript{35}. The situation has been quite dire in South Sudan since the 2013 civil conflict began. By 2018, 48% of schools in the country were non-functioning due to infrastructure damage and population displacement\textsuperscript{36}.

Beyond the impact of conflicts, education itself has become for some “the new target of terrorism” and East Africa and the Horn of Africa region is no exception. In Somalia, Sudan, Kenya and Djibouti, schools are attacked, and students and education personnel are killed and abducted. In 2015, in Somalia, Al Shabaab had attacked the Ministry of Education. A few months earlier, they had also attacked the University of Garissa in Kenya, killing several people. A process of forced recruitment and abduction of children from rural areas by Al-Shabaab terrorists badly affects children’s access to education\textsuperscript{37}.

Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close as part of lockdown measures. In Kenya 17 million scholars missed more than 9 months of formal education. Uganda also implemented a two-year break only reopening school in 2022. Long school closures exposed school aged children to violence, child labor and increased pressure on girls to drop out due to marriage and pregnancy\textsuperscript{38}.

![FIGURE 4: NET PRIMARY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT FOR EAST AFRICA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA](source: World Bank and UNICEF)
Privatization of Service Delivery

In nearly all African countries, privatization of some services has gained momentum. Privatization effectively includes contracting government functions out of the public sector or selling State assets.

Post-conflict countries such as Sudan and Eritrea, and transitional contexts such as South Sudan typically attract significant investments in service delivery from donors. Donors work in a number of different ways depending on the relationships and existing structures. These partnerships can be moderated by the State or in collaboration with the host States or have parallel programs, primarily run through non-State actors such as NGOs and UN agencies. Given the limited capacities of fragile States, it has become common for non-state actors to be the primary providers of basic services, leading some to conclude that social service provision by non-state actors is a universal feature of developing countries.

In contrast, aid agencies sometimes work more directly with the State. For example, WaterAid partnered with Tanzania’s government in the Kigamboni and Tembeke Municipality to develop Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems (DEWATS). These partnerships were implemented to construct a fecal sludge treatment plant which recycles fecal material and wastewater into fertilizer and produces biogas.

Best practice in post-conflict service delivery is commonly thought to resemble a stewardship approach, sometimes referred to as ‘contracting out’, whereby aid agencies, inter-governmental organizations (INGOs) and NGOs operate under the general purview of the government. As domestic capacity accumulates, the role of external agencies should taper off, ultimately becoming redundant as capable and legitimate states take shape.
The East Africa and Horn of Africa region continues to face insecurity and instability. Somalia and Kenya’s ongoing challenges with the Al-Shabaab insurgency has seemingly spread to Uganda. Ethiopia’s civil conflict between the government and Tigray fighters is currently ongoing. These have been compounded by communal conflicts in countries such as in South Sudan. South Sudan is still experiencing sporadic violence in states such as Upper Nile and Unity State (Western Upper Nile), despite the signing of the Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Sudan has also failed to achieve political stability after former leader Omar Al-Bahir’s ouster, for instance an attempted coup in October 2021 triggered street protests and political crisis.

FIGURE 5: ACLED DATA ON PROTESTS AND VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS IN EAST AFRICA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA (NOVEMBER 2020-2021)
Source: ACLED data on protests and violent demonstrations, 2020-2021 (Regional Overview: Africa 20-26 November 2021 (acleddata.com)
The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) reported 13,893 incidents of political violence resulting in 25,819 fatalities between November 2020 and November 2021 alone in the East Africa and the Horn of Africa region. These events ranged from mob violence, through suicide bombings to armed clashes between governments and non-state actors. Figure 5, sourced from ACLED, illustrates the trend in protest movements within the same period, indicating that this form of political violence shows no signs of abating.

It is commonly accepted that protest movements are most often linked to governance issues: demands for rights, calls for democracy, denunciation of the high cost of living or in relation to economic, social and political inequalities or injustices. Discontent, dissatisfaction, frustration and disavowal create gaps and facilitate mobilization in protest movements. As we have seen, it is very easy to connect protest movements and governance issues.

However, the connection between conflicts and the state of access to services, although often referred to, is a much more complex matter. When closely examined, the same process is found in the engagement in armed conflicts. In Ethiopia, the alliance of the protest movement in one of the Oromia provinces with the People’s Liberation Front of Tigray raises questions.

This locality, often considered the bastion of protest in Ethiopia, has been experiencing high tensions for several years, with demonstrations often violently repressed. Most of the protests are related to governance issues. In 2019 the population protested against the allocation of housing units built on unduly acquired agricultural land. This situation is fostered beyond the desire for self-determination by a long-standing and still prevalent feeling of political and cultural marginalization and discrimination. The Tigray crises point to the interaction between the state of service delivery and deep-rooted conflict dynamics in fueling protests and the escalation of protests into prolonged armed conflicts.
Conclusion and Recommendation

Political violence negatively affects public service delivery and could be a catalyst for tension, conflict and violence. Also, governance processes undergoing democratic decline become increasingly unstable and could drive negative perceptions of State institutions such as the judiciary, election management bodies and State commissions. Moreover, the militarization of politics means that governments respond to political grievances with coercion rather than dialogue. This motivates citizens to view violence as a viable means of political participation because they claim that State institutions are biased and illegitimate. This affects the State’s ability to deliver public and social services as revenues are disproportionately spent on military expenditure instead of on funding social protection initiatives such as education, housing, health services, and access to clean water and sanitation.

Additionally, the problems of governance and service delivery associated with authoritarian regression harm the relationship between the State and its citizens and between the communities themselves. They create or contribute to cleavages and divisions between those perceived as privileged and those who feel marginalized and discriminated against and are often used and instrumentalized for political purposes. Unequal access to basic social services creates frustrations, grievances, resentments often linked to a feeling or perception of exclusion, discrimination, marginalization, injustice, etc. A vicious circle is created as conflicts and insecurity affect access to services in conflict or military operation zones. The policy paper therefore recommends the following to help address the challenges faced in providing basic social services in the region:

1. Establishing and improving inclusive governance processes

Promote equity in access to services for communities that are often excluded and accompany it with awareness and communication at all levels because misunderstanding of policies is often a source of conflict tensions. The governments in East Africa and the Horn of Africa region must implement the following key interventions to improve inclusive governance processes:

- Develop policies that promote the inclusion of traditionally excluded communities
• Encourage dialogue and negotiation with dissidents whose involvement is linked to discrimination, exclusion, etc.

• Promote access to long-term housing finance for low- and irregular-income households

• Harness ICTs to support access to quality education

• Enable health systems and services for minorities

• Foster private investment in health systems

• Boost health sector investments in labor, infrastructure/equipment, and supplies

2. Enhancing security sector governance

Intergovernmental organizations must encourage Member States in the East Africa and Horn of Africa region to reform security institutions and limit the militarization of politics. Governments must establish policy frameworks that strengthen civilian oversight of the security sector and ensure that the security sectors function is guided by respect for human rights and democratic norms.

3. Clarifying the linkages between governance/service delivery and conflict

Raise awareness of the link between access to public and basic social services and governance among government officials and the Ministries concerned. Indeed, for the Ministries of Peace, not taking this dimension into account could impact the effectiveness of the initiatives and make their mission more complex. For those concerned with social affairs, failure to consider exclusion factors could affect the efficacy of these interventions and influence the dynamics of conflict.
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17 Ibid. 2011


21 Statista includes Rwanda and Burundi as East African countries, but for these countries are excluded for the purposes of this policy paper.

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36 Cyprian Amutabi and Martha Nyantiop Agoot, Determinants of disparities in primary school enrolment in South Sudan, Cogent Education, Volume 8, 2021.


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