

Call for Papers on “Africa’s Fiscal Space, Fragility and Conflict”

15 October 2021

1. Context and Objectives

With the adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063, global leaders have committed to following a people-centered approach to development with the vision of leaving no one behind while ensuring prosperity for all. The two Agendas recognize that development, peace, security, humanitarian and human rights efforts are complementary and need to reinforce each other, to respond to volatile situations in Africa and around the world. This calls for adopting comprehensive and holistic approaches spanning across peace, security, development, and humanitarian affairs and reinforcing the nexus. With less than a decade to the 2030 target date, significant progress is still necessary in all sectors to achieve the shared vision of a peaceful, integrated, prosperous Africa and leaving no one behind. As much as it is well established that peace and stability promote development, positive development outcomes are also critical for preventing violence and conflict and sustaining peace. The UN Secretary-General has also underscored the need to place prevention at the centre of all the UN’s activities while prioritising, among others, building resilience to external economic and financial shocks and early warning and early action to prevent violent conflict.

With the changing geo-political landscape, there is an increased focus on the nexus between peace, development, and humanitarian affairs across the United Nations system. OSAA through its advocacy and advisory works has been highlighting the emerging and persisting challenges to implementing the nexus in Africa. It has provided platforms for UN entities, the AU, as well as academic experts and researchers to deliberate on the role of advocacy and research in strengthening the nexus approach in Africa. The Office has also prepared and provided technical support in the preparation of reports and policy research, which highlight the conceptual and practical issues underlying the nexus, as well as opportunities and good practices in nexus implementation.

To help strengthen the capacity of African countries in integrating the nexus in their policies and frameworks and plans, OSAA is implementing an extra-budgetary project on “Strengthening the capacity of African Countries to design and implement policies that promote the nexus between peace, security and development for an accelerated implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”. The project which is being implemented in close collaboration with UNECA and OHRLLS, is funded by the United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund-the Peace and Security Sub Fund. Through this project, OSAA aims to contribute towards raising awareness of and strengthening capacities of African countries to formulate and implement policies that reinforce the interlinkages between development, peace, security, humanitarian and human rights.

Over the past two decades, African countries experienced rapid economic growth. However, growth did not necessarily lead to meaningful socio-economic gains as unemployment, inequality and high level of poverty continued to persist across the continent. According to the African Development Bank, Africa's labour force is projected to expand by nearly 40% by 2030. Based on the current trend, that means only half of the new labour force entering the market will find a job, leaving additional 100 million young people jobless.

The on-going COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse negative impact on Africa resulting in growth deceleration, loss of income, dwindling revenue, rising unemployment and poverty. It has also exposed the glaring vulnerabilities of the continent to external shocks. Measures introduced to contain the spread of the coronavirus including national lockdowns and border closures have affected African countries particularly hard, due to the large informal sector and low ICT penetration, making it difficult for people to work and study from home.

Though instability and conflict in Africa were already on the rise, the pandemic has heightened the major structural inequalities that drive conflict. Facing shrinking fiscal space resulting from growth collapse and associated decline in income and revenue due to the direct and indirect effects of COVID-19, African governments had to cut spending on key services including social protection, which had a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable including the marginalised groups. Against the backdrop of high unemployment and persisting inequalities and deteriorating socio-economic conditions, this provided the fertile ground for increased instability and growing illegal and violent activities. For instance, political violence rose by 4,328 events in 2020 in Africa¹. In addition, efforts to counter violent attacks and illegal activities by national security forces put further strain on the already overstretched national budgets.

Furthermore, African countries experienced increasing debt levels even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the IMF, seventeen countries, representing roughly a quarter of the continent's GDP, are either at debt distress or high risk of debt distress. Without adequate measures, nationally and globally, to address the problem, rising interest payments and indebtedness would add to the already precarious fiscal situation by diverting resources away from growth enhancing and productive and social investments. This could further lead to a vicious cycle of deprivation, potentially further fuelling conflict and instabilities.

Rising unemployment, loss of income, and the associated social consequences coupled with governments' inability to sustain spending on essential services in the context of shrinking fiscal space pose significant challenges for the prevention agenda. If not addressed effectively, the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on countries' economic, social and political wellbeing are likely to provide further breeding ground for large scale and sustained conflicts in Africa. This underscores the need to invest in prevention, including through supporting measures to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic as well as strengthening institutions to curtail the risk of violent escalation.

There is also a need to support African countries to boost their fiscal space including by strengthening their capacity to mobilise domestic resources for post-pandemic recovery. Weak institutions including revenue collection and administration authorities in many African countries

¹ The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) 2020: The Year in Review

undermine domestic revenue mobilization and governments' ability to harness sufficient financing for their development needs towards inclusive and sustainable growth. The Revenue Statistics in Africa 2020 Report² indicates that in 2018, the unweighted average tax-to-GDP ratio for the 30 African countries under review was 16.5%, compared to an average of 23.1% for Latin America and the Caribbean. The lack of institutional capacity prevents the state from playing an effective role in establishing and enforcing laws and regulations, promoting development, creating an environment where tax evasion and incompliance is rampant and unchecked. Corruption also poses a significant challenge to domestic resource mobilisation. Transparency and cooperation between tax administrations within the region, through platforms such as the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF), as well as regional knowledge networks and capacity building for tax and customs authorities, will be crucial in the fight against corruption and tax evasion.³

In addition, addressing illicit financial flows (IFFs) is integral to expanding Africa's fiscal space. The promotion of a strong international framework that is ready to combat and eliminate the challenge of IFFs is crucial, including efforts to bridge the gaps in the existing system.⁴ Solutions to IFFs in Africa will also require not only international tax cooperation, but also anti-corruption measures and institutional building support for local institutions as mentioned above. The international community can also support African countries boost their fiscal space through increased concessional financing in order to sustain lives and livelihoods on the continent

It is against this backdrop that the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) is launching a call for papers on **"Africa's fiscal space, fragility and conflict"** with a view to raise awareness on this important issue, and to promote efforts by African countries and development partners to improve the fiscal space for sustainable development, avert deterioration of fragility, and prevent conflict on the continent. The selected papers will be compiled in one or several publications and their authors will be invited to participate in a conference with representatives of Member States and UN entities to be held in a hybrid virtual/in-person format.

Submitted papers might also inform:

- a) United Nations policies, strategies, and operational interventions in Africa, including through UN Interdepartmental Taskforce on African Affairs (UN-IDTFAA) to effectively provide support to Africa's recovery in the post pandemic era.
- b) Africa's national, sub-regional, and regional strategies to build forward better post-COVID-19.
- c) OSAA's forthcoming advocacy and advisory activities, including through the Africa Dialogues Series, the Africa Day on the margins of the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development as well as reports and policy papers on the promotion of sustainable development in Africa.

² Jointly produced by the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF), the African Union Commission (AUC), and the OECD.

³ UNCTAD (2020). "Africa could gain \$89 billion annually by curbing illicit financial flows".

⁴ AUDA-NEPAD (2020). "The Global Dilemma of Illicit Financial Flows: Time for Collective Action".

2. Paper format

The papers should be **analytical in nature** and offer **concrete policy recommendations** to provide policy makers with the latest analysis and suggestions for moving forward, in the context of the post-COVID 19 recovery in Africa by increasing fiscal space, overcoming fragility and preventing conflict. The proposed policy recommendations should focus on **solutions from within Africa**, highlighting action points to be undertaken by national and regional stakeholders. Although development partners and international cooperation play an important role in advancing fiscal space and preventing conflict in the region, the emphasis should be on policies and initiatives **driven and led by African stakeholders**. Analysis should be based on the most recent and relevant data, identify key trends across Africa and propose responses relevant to African countries. Papers related to ongoing research projects are also welcome.

The analysis and recommendations will help inform new strategies and policies that will enable African countries to more effectively address their structural challenges, efficiently manage their fiscal space and meet their sustainable development needs, while averting fragility and preventing conflict. The papers should also outline concrete measures to be undertaken by African countries and institutions, as well as complimentary measures by Africa's bilateral and multilateral partners including the UN System entities and other important stakeholders.

3. Applications

This call is open to senior and junior academics, particular African academics, as well as experts from international and regional organizations, thinktanks and NGOs working in these areas, who are all invited to submit proposals for papers, highlighting:

- a) the connection of the proposed paper to Africa's fiscal space, fragility, and peace and conflict landscape, and to the achievement of the SDGs;
- b) the methodology that will be used (including the type of data and analysis that will be used;
- c) highlighting key risks and opportunities for Africa's fiscal space; and
- d) the policy area(s) to which recommendations will relate.

Please submit the proposal, in English, French or Portuguese, to OSAA's email address at OSAA@un.org by **Tuesday, 30 November 2021**, including the following:

- 1) The author's name, nationality, and affiliation.
- 2) 800-1,000 word proposal including the four elements outlined above [Word files only];
- 3) The author's CV, including a list of relevant publications [Word or PDF files];
- 4) The author's contact details, including email address and phone number.

Co-authored and multidisciplinary papers are welcome.

Applicants will be informed of the organizer's decision no later than Wednesday **15 December 2021**.

Papers should be between 7,500 and 10,000 words and be submitted by **Friday 28 January 2022**. A 500-word abstract and 5 key words should be included in the submission.

Papers will be reviewed by the senior management of OSAA and members of its Knowledge Network. Any query on application, please feel free to contact at OSAA@un.org.

4. Conference on fiscal space and fragility in Africa

OSAA will organize, in the first quarter of 2022, a Conference on fiscal space and fragility in Africa, to promote exchanges between experts and the academia, on the one hand, and United Nations practitioners and Member States' representatives. Authors of submitted manuscripts will be invited to participate in the Conference.

5. Publication opportunities

Accepted manuscripts will be issued in a publication. Additional publications may be issued focused on one or more manuscripts selected for their quality and innovative approach.

6. Other opportunities

Participating authors may be invited to participate in future events and activities organized by OSAA such as the Africa Dialogue Series, as well as to contribute to workshops and knowledge-generation processes with UN entities and Member States' representatives.