

**Virtual OSAA Think Tank Network and ACBF Experts Panel Webinar**

# **DIGITALIZATION FOR PEACE IN AFRICA**

**“Stronger States Through Public Service Digitalization: Enhancing  
Peace and Security in Africa”**

## **Concept Note**

**When:** Thursday, 3 November 2022

**Time:** 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM (New York time)



## I. Background and Thematic Focus

### A. The Nature of Conflict in Africa

Africa faces persistent and emerging challenges that impede the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development. Indeed, instability and conflict continue to generate and exacerbate poverty and institutional fragility, which in turn decrease resilience and prospects for peace. The [International Rescue Committee's 2022 Emergency Watchlist](#) placed six African countries in the top 10 worldwide global list of humanitarian crises that were predicted to deteriorate during the year.<sup>1</sup>

Africa is facing interrelated challenges of recurring conflict, increasing international terrorism and the destructive impact of climate change, all of which contribute to growing insecurity and instability. Moreover, the nature of conflicts in Africa is becoming progressively more complex and regionalized. While most conflicts in Africa are intra-state in nature, they increasingly involve non-state armed groups with links to criminal interests or terrorist networks that operate across borders. As a result, peace has become more challenging to sustain, and protracted and recurring conflicts more difficult to prevent or resolve, often because their underlying causes are not well understood or addressed.

Active conflicts, instability and conflict incidents show a clear upward trend across the continent in recent years. According to one database, in 2019 there were 27 active conflicts in 19 countries in Africa, and 8,855 known fatalities because of those conflicts. Since 2015, the number of conflicts has slightly increased. [In addition, from 2015 to 2020, the number of incidents related to civil unrest nearly doubled.](#)

Unlike all other regions of the world, political violence rose in Africa even during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, by 4,328 events and 9,298 fatalities in 2020 compared with 2019 figures. This increase, perpetuated by the sad events in Ethiopia, Uganda and the Sahel, among others, was driven by a variety of factors, [including intensified subnational competition and state repression to new frontlines in the jihadi conflicts in Mali and Mozambique.](#)

### B. Weak Presence of the State Diminishes Legitimacy, Creates Fertile Ground for Instability

To respond effectively to instability and violent conflicts in Africa, it is important to begin by identifying the elements of the multidimensional and complex nature of their causes and drivers. Of the myriad drivers of conflict, *the weak presence or absence of the state, particularly in peripheral regions of countries, can be seen as a primary factor of instability.* [Limited infrastructure, essential services and security weaken the legitimacy of governments and can create fertile ground for instability, criminal activities, violent extremism and terrorism.](#)

Conversely, the citizenry often identifies the legitimacy of a central state with its ability to deliver satisfactory public services. While service delivery is not the only determinant of state legitimacy, it is a primary way by which people often directly encounter the state and, in this respect, [shapes their overall perception of it.](#) The satisfactory delivery of education, health care, water, sanitation, as well as justice to the populace and security has been described as [“the glue” that binds the state and society together.](#) *In this regard, unsatisfactory public service delivery may diminish state legitimacy and thus raise the risk of violence.*

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<sup>1</sup> The African countries on the list are Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Sudan.

### **C. Role of Digitalization of Public Service Delivery in Improving Peace and Security Outcomes**

With a view to improving the delivery of satisfactory public services – thereby enhancing the public’s perception of the state as a legitimate authority – governments in Africa have begun, in recent years, turning to digitalization of these services. Digitalization can be both internal (making government processes more automated and efficient, therefore reducing unnecessary slowdowns or bureaucratic bottlenecks in service delivery) and external (for example, establishing web-based platforms for making payments for government services or checking on the status of service upgrades).

GovTech is the growing area of technology that aims at increasing efficacy and efficiency of government functions. It emphasizes three aspects of public sector modernization: citizen-centric public services that are universally accessible, a whole-of-government approach to digital government transformation, and simple, efficient and transparent government systems. Simply stated, GovTech is the application of emerging technologies – such as advanced sensing, advanced data processing, artificial intelligence and blockchain – [to improve the delivery of public services through increasing efficiency and lowering costs](#).

One example in Africa can be found in Rwanda, where the government established a single, secure platform named [Irembo](#) where citizens can access numerous government services, including applications for national identification cards, transferring land ownership deeds, and making appointments for yellow fever vaccinations.

The webinar builds on the 2022 OSAA advocacy brief, [“Stronger States for Increased Stability: Digitalization of Public Service Delivery for Peace and Security in Africa”](#).

## **II. Webinar Objectives**

The main objective of the webinar is to exchange ideas on the promotion of digitalization of public service delivery in governance as a panacea for durable peace and security outcomes and sustainable development in Africa.

The specific objectives are to:

- Explore practical ways of promoting a shift towards digitalization of certain government functions and processes as the most efficient and cost effective way of solving the recurrent challenges of instability or fragility of states in Africa;
- Raise awareness of the opportunities for positively enhancing public perception of the state through digitalizing of public services;
- Sensitize decision-makers on the need for enhanced national budgeting for digitalization of public service delivery; and
- Provide policy recommendations on prioritization of digitalization of public service delivery.

## **III. Key Output**

A web-based report of the event will be disseminated among participants and stakeholders.

#### **IV. Expected Outcome**

It is expected that at the end of the discourse, participants and other stakeholders will understand the benefits of digitalization in governance and would be able to use the output document to encourage the prioritization and shift to the digitalization that aims to increase efficacy and efficiency of government functions. This is expected to ultimately increase public perception and acceptance of state legitimacy, durable peace and sustainable development in Africa.

#### **V. Format and Participation**

The event will last two hours and will be hosted virtually via the Zoom platform. As a public event, it will be open to government officials from African Member States, as well as representatives from African regional organizations, the UN system, and representatives from think tanks and knowledge experts, civil society, academia, and the media. There will be simultaneous interpretation in English and French. Registration will be required.

#### **VI. Co-organizers**

The event is co-organized by the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa and the African Capacity Building Foundation, as well as the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) and the Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCADD), which are members of the OSAA Think Tank Network for cluster three on 'Democracy, Resilience and Human Capital'.