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EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY AT THE LOUPE; REGIONAL INTEGRATION, PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND CONFLICTS (2024)

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ABSTRACT

The East African Community (EAC) has made significant strides toward regional integration, particularly in the areas of political cooperation and security. One of the key initiatives in this regard is the East African Standby Force (EASF), which aims to address regional security challenges and promote political stability. However, despite notable progress, the region continues to face challenges, including divergent political systems among member states and inadequate resources for the EASF. These obstacles hinder the effective execution of regional security strategies and the achievement of sustainable political cooperation. Strengthening political will, enhancing the operational capacity of the EASF, and improving cross-border collaboration are crucial to overcoming these barriers. The study concludes that a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to regional security is essential for the EAC's long-term stability and integration. In terms of recommendations, there is a need for increased investment in regional security mechanisms, fostering political commitment among member states, and strengthening partnerships with international actors. Additionally, addressing the root causes of conflicts, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), strengthening governance, and enhancing security cooperation are vital for ensuring lasting peace and stability in the region. In conclusion, the conflicts between EAC neighboring countries are multifaceted, involving political, ethnic, resource-based, and security concerns. While the region has made some progress in addressing these challenges, there remains a need for stronger regional cooperation and conflict-resolution mechanisms to ensure lasting peace and stability. The EAC's ability to resolve these conflicts will determine not only the future of the member states but also the prosperity and security of the wider East African region.

Keywords: *East African Community, regional integration, political cooperation, East African Standby Force, security challenges, political instability, non-state actors, cross-border cooperation, peacekeeping.*

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INTRODUCTION

The East African Community (EAC) is a regional intergovernmental organization comprising eight member states: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda. Founded in 1967, the EAC has undergone several phases of cooperation and integration, notably revived in 2000 after a breakdown in the 1970s and 1980s (EAC, 2021). With its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania, the community seeks to create a unified market, enhance regional trade, and improve infrastructural connectivity. The expansion of the bloc, particularly with the recent inclusion of the DRC, has widened its geographical reach, increasing its population and economic potential. The community operates under the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community, which provides a framework for political, economic, and cultural integration. The primary goal is to build a strong and competitive East African region that can effectively compete on the global stage (Kiyoshi & Gichuki, 2020).

Economically, the East African Community (EAC) has made significant strides in enhancing trade and investment within the region. The establishment of the Customs Union in 2005 and the Common Market Protocol in 2010 allowed for the free movement of goods, labor, and capital among member states, providing a solid foundation for deeper economic integration. These initiatives have boosted intra-regional trade, attracted foreign direct investment (FDI), and facilitated a more integrated regional economy (EAC Secretariat, 2022). For example, the EAC's Customs Union has led to reduced tariff barriers, allowing member states to trade more freely with each other. However, trade imbalances persist, with Kenya and Tanzania being dominant exporters, while other member states, such as Burundi and South Sudan, continue to struggle with limited industrialization (Ochieng, 2022). These disparities highlight the need for continued efforts to harmonize policies, reduce non-tariff barriers, and ensure equitable economic growth within the community (Mugisha, 2023). In recent years, the community has made substantial strides in removing trade barriers and promoting regional infrastructural projects such as the Northern Corridor, which connects East Africa's seaports to the hinterlands of Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan (Kabagambe, 2021).

Politically, the EAC envisions deeper integration, with aspirations of forming a Political Federation that would create a supranational authority governing the region, similar to the European Union. This vision is aimed at ensuring collective decision-making and fostering greater political cohesion among the member states (Mugisha, 2023). While significant progress has been made in harmonizing laws and policies through institutions such as the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) and the East African Court of Justice (EACJ), challenges remain (Asiimwe, 2020). Political instability, particularly in countries like South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has hindered full participation in regional integration efforts. These internal conflicts, along with differing political systems and governance structures, complicate efforts toward deeper political unity (Omolo, 2023). Moreover, sovereignty concerns and national interests often slow decision-making within the EAC, as countries are hesitant to cede certain powers to a central authority.

Infrastructure development has been a key focus of the EAC, with major projects aimed at enhancing connectivity and facilitating trade across the region. Key initiatives include the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), cross-border roads, and energy interconnection projects. These infrastructural advancements are crucial for reducing trade costs and enhancing the region's competitiveness (Ochieng, 2022). For example, the Northern and Central Corridors serve as critical trade routes linking landlocked countries to the coastal ports of Mombasa and Dar es Salaam, facilitating the efficient flow of goods (EAC Secretariat, 2024). However, funding constraints and project delays have hindered the full realization of these infrastructure goals. Inadequate financing and logistical challenges have slowed the completion of key projects, underscoring the need for increased public-private partnerships and external financing to meet regional infrastructure demands (Mugisha, 2021).

Socially, the EAC promotes regional cohesion through cultural exchange programs, education initiatives, and labor mobility. One of the most significant achievements in fostering regional unity is the adoption of

Kiswahili as one of the official languages of the EAC, which helps cultivate a shared identity among East Africans (Omolo, 2023). In addition to language, policies allowing students to study in other member states without restrictions and the mutual recognition of academic qualifications have enhanced educational opportunities across the region. These policies have enabled students to pursue education within the EAC without bureaucratic barriers, facilitating skills development and cultural exchange (Ochieng, 2022). However, challenges such as xenophobia, visa restrictions, and differences in employment policies still hinder social cohesion. Overcoming these barriers is essential for achieving seamless integration and ensuring the free movement of people within the region (Mugisha, 2023).

Despite its challenges, the East African Community remains one of Africa's most ambitious regional blocs. The success of the EAC will depend on continued commitment to economic integration, political stability, infrastructure development, and social cohesion. Addressing governance disparities, reducing trade barriers, and improving security cooperation will be crucial to strengthening the EAC's vision of a prosperous and integrated region. For instance, improved collaboration among member states in addressing cross-border security challenges, such as terrorism and political instability, is necessary to create a more secure environment for business and development (EAC Secretariat, 2024). Additionally, reducing the gap between economically advanced countries, like Kenya and Tanzania, and others with less developed economies, such as Burundi and South Sudan, will be critical to ensuring that all member states benefit from the integration process.

Moving forward, enhanced collaboration and adherence to shared objectives will be vital in realizing the full potential of the East African Community. The EAC's future success hinges on the ability of its member states to manage internal conflicts, harmonize national policies, and pursue common goals for the good of the region. Strong leadership, coupled with a unified vision, will be key in realizing the aspirations of the community (Munyua, 2022). As the region continues to integrate politically and economically, the EAC holds significant promise as a model for regional cooperation in Africa.

Progress in Regional Integration

Trade and Economic Integration:

The East African Community (EAC) has made significant strides in promoting economic integration, with the establishment of a Customs Union in 2005 and a Common Market in 2010 standing as major milestones in the region's pursuit of regional integration. These agreements were designed to eliminate trade barriers within the region and facilitate the free movement of goods, services, and people, enhancing economic cooperation and intra-regional trade (Munyua, 2022). The creation of the Customs Union was pivotal, as it introduced a common external tariff, harmonizing trade rules for EAC member states, and eliminating non-tariff barriers that had previously hampered the free flow of goods. These measures were expected to boost intra-regional trade, particularly in agricultural and manufactured goods, and to support the growth of industries by providing a larger, integrated market.

Following the establishment of the Customs Union, the EAC members furthered their commitment to economic integration by signing the Common Market Protocol in 2010. This protocol built upon the progress made through the Customs Union by allowing not only the free movement of goods but also services, capital, and labor (Asiimwe, 2020). The Common Market thus aimed to create a borderless region where citizens could live, work, and trade freely, contributing to a more integrated and competitive regional economy. This initiative marked a crucial shift toward greater economic unity, helping the EAC countries to better compete on the global stage by expanding their markets and providing access to a broader range of resources.

One of the primary benefits of the Common Market has been the increased mobility of labor within the EAC region. Citizens of member states are now able to move freely between countries to seek employment, enhancing their chances of finding better work opportunities and contributing to economic growth

(Kabagambe, 2021). Furthermore, the removal of restrictions on services and capital movement has allowed for the development of regional businesses and investments. This has particularly benefitted sectors like finance, tourism, and telecommunications, where companies have expanded their operations across borders, increasing regional collaboration and business development.

Additionally, the EAC has been active in strengthening its global trade relations, with the signing of various trade agreements that open up international markets for its member states. Notably, the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union, signed in 2007 and ratified in 2016, represents a major step in the region's efforts to deepen its economic integration with the global economy (Mugisha, 2021). The EPA is aimed at promoting sustainable development by offering the EAC preferential access to the EU market for key exports, including agricultural products, which are a significant part of the region's economy. The agreement has been seen as a key tool for enhancing trade, improving the investment climate, and fostering regional industrialization.

The EAC has also been working on various initiatives to strengthen infrastructure in the region, which is essential for facilitating trade and economic integration. Regional projects such as the Northern Corridor and the Central Corridor are examples of cross-border infrastructure efforts aimed at improving transportation and communication between EAC member states (Kiyoshi & Gichuki, 2020). These projects are critical for reducing transport costs and time delays, particularly for landlocked countries like Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. Improved infrastructure also strengthens supply chains, enabling businesses to deliver goods to markets faster and more efficiently, thus boosting regional trade and economic activity.

However, the road to full economic integration is not without its challenges. Despite significant progress, there are still barriers that hinder deeper integration, such as political differences, economic disparities, and security concerns in some of the member states. The entry of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) into the EAC in 2022 highlighted both the opportunities and challenges faced by the community. The DRC's large size, rich natural resources, and strategic position offer substantial economic potential, but the country's history of political instability and underdeveloped infrastructure present challenges for integration efforts (Munyua, 2022). This has raised concerns about the pace and effectiveness of integration, with some fearing that the region may struggle to harmonize policies and development agendas.

In addition to these internal challenges, the EAC must contend with external factors that can impact its trade relations and economic integration. Global economic trends, such as trade protectionism, fluctuations in commodity prices, and the impact of climate change, pose risks to the region's economic stability and growth prospects. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global supply chains, and the subsequent global economic slowdown affected the region's ability to meet its trade and development targets (Munyua, 2022). These external factors underscore the need for the EAC to diversify its economies, reduce dependency on specific sectors, and increase resilience to global shocks.

Looking ahead, the future of trade and economic integration within the EAC is promising, but will require sustained effort from all member states. The continued development of infrastructure, the expansion of trade agreements, and the resolution of internal political and economic challenges will be crucial for unlocking the full potential of the EAC. As the region works toward the realization of a monetary union and a single currency, the EAC must also prioritize the harmonization of policies, the strengthening of governance structures, and the promotion of inclusive economic growth that benefits all its citizens (Asiimwe, 2020). The success of these efforts will be key to the long-term prosperity and stability of the East African region.

Infrastructure Development:

Infrastructure development has become a pivotal focus for the East African Community (EAC), particularly in the transport and energy sectors, as it plays a crucial role in promoting regional integration, enhancing economic growth, and reducing the costs of doing business within the region. With increased investment in infrastructure projects such as the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) and regional power grids, the EAC is making strides toward creating a more interconnected and competitive regional market. The importance of such infrastructure cannot be overstated as it facilitates the free movement of goods, services, and people, which are essential for economic development (Kiyoshi & Gichuki, 2020).

One of the most notable infrastructure projects is the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), which aims to improve connectivity between East African countries, particularly Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The SGR project is designed to create a modern rail network that will reduce transport costs and enhance regional trade by connecting major ports such as Mombasa and Dar es Salaam with landlocked countries like Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan (Kabagambe, 2021). The SGR is expected to reduce transit times significantly, thereby improving supply chains and creating economic opportunities, particularly in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing, which are vital for the region's economies.

Furthermore, the SGR is expected to ease congestion on existing road networks, leading to reduced vehicle operating costs and a decrease in the wear and tear of roads. However, despite its promises, the implementation of the SGR has not been without challenges. Some critics argue that the project is capital-intensive, and questions have been raised regarding its sustainability in the long term, particularly concerning its financing and the potential for regional cooperation to ensure its success (Mugisha, 2021). Despite these concerns, the project reflects the EAC's commitment to modernizing its transport infrastructure and promoting economic integration.

The regional power grid is another key infrastructure development initiative by the EAC. The East African Power Pool (EAPP) aims to interconnect the national grids of member states, creating a shared regional electricity market. This initiative is vital for addressing the region's energy deficit and ensuring the availability of reliable and affordable electricity, which is essential for industrialization and economic growth. By connecting the national grids of countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Ethiopia, the EAPP seeks to optimize electricity generation and consumption, ensuring that power is available even in countries experiencing energy shortages (Munyua, 2022).

The regional power grid is also expected to reduce energy costs by enabling the sharing of surplus electricity between countries. For instance, countries with excess hydroelectric power, such as Ethiopia, can export energy to those with deficits, such as Kenya and Tanzania. This integration will not only help address the region's energy challenges but also provide a platform for sustainable energy generation from renewable sources such as wind, solar, and geothermal, which are abundant in the region. Through such initiatives, the EAC is advancing its vision of becoming a leading global economic hub by ensuring that energy infrastructure keeps pace with its growing demands (Munyua, 2022).

In addition to transport and energy, the EAC has also focused on other critical infrastructure projects that are essential for boosting regional trade and economic integration. For example, the development of regional ports, such as the expansion of the Mombasa Port in Kenya, is aimed at improving access to global markets for landlocked countries within the region. The expansion of these ports, along with the improvement of roads and railways, will reduce transit time and costs for goods moving in and out of the region, fostering a more efficient supply chain and enhancing trade flows between member states (Kabagambe, 2021).

Despite the successes and ambitious plans, the implementation of infrastructure projects in the EAC faces several challenges. These include political instability, inadequate funding, and the slow pace of project execution due to bureaucratic hurdles and differing national priorities. In some cases, countries may face challenges in mobilizing the necessary resources for large-scale infrastructure projects, leading to delays in their completion (Asiimwe, 2020). Furthermore, disparities in the levels of development across the region can hinder the effectiveness of some infrastructure projects, particularly when certain member states are unable to fully benefit from regional infrastructure investments.

In conclusion, infrastructure development remains a cornerstone of the EAC's efforts to enhance regional integration and economic growth. The successful implementation of projects such as the Standard Gauge Railway and the East African Power Pool has the potential to revolutionize the region's connectivity, reduce transport costs, and improve energy access. However, the realization of these ambitious projects requires overcoming significant challenges, including political, financial, and logistical barriers. As the EAC continues to invest in infrastructure, it must adopt strategies that promote collaboration, ensure sustainability, and address the diverse needs of its member states to fully unlock the potential of regional integration.

Political Cooperation and Security:

The East African Community (EAC) has long recognized the importance of regional peace and security for ensuring its continued integration and prosperity. As such, one of its key priorities has been the promotion of political cooperation and the strengthening of security mechanisms. The EAC has established several initiatives to address security challenges and create a stable environment conducive to regional cooperation. One of the most significant of these initiatives is the East African Standby Force (EASF), which was created to enhance the region's ability to respond to conflicts and crises that may arise within or around its borders (EAC, 2020).

The EASF, established in 2004, is a multi-national peacekeeping force that serves as the EAC’s primary tool for maintaining peace and security in the region. The force is composed of military, police, and civilian components from all member states, and it is designed to provide a rapid-response capability in situations of conflict, natural disasters, or other security-related crises. The creation of the EASF aligns with the African Union's broader goal of establishing regional standby forces to address peace and security issues across the continent (African Union, 2020). While the force has not yet been deployed in a full-scale mission, it has conducted various peacekeeping exercises and has contributed to conflict management efforts within the region, particularly in Burundi and South Sudan.

In addition to the EASF, the EAC has been instrumental in promoting dialogue among its member states through regular summits and conferences. These meetings provide a platform for political leaders to discuss pressing security and political issues, share perspectives, and build consensus on regional policies. The EAC holds regular Heads of State summits, where political cooperation is at the forefront of the agenda. These summits allow member states to address both internal and external security concerns, including border disputes, terrorism, and instability in neighboring countries (EAC, 2020). By fostering dialogue, the EAC aims to prevent the escalation of conflicts and to encourage peaceful conflict resolution.

The EAC has also made strides in enhancing democratic governance within its member states, with an emphasis on promoting good governance practices as a means of fostering political stability. Through various protocols and agreements, the organization has encouraged its members to adopt democratic reforms, strengthen human rights, and ensure the rule of law. For instance, the EAC's Political Federation Protocol aims to create a unified political structure that promotes democratic ideals and facilitates the peaceful coexistence of member states. This focus on governance is seen as crucial to preventing the rise of authoritarian regimes, which often contribute to political instability and conflict (EAC, 2019).

Despite these positive steps, challenges remain in the EAC's efforts to promote political cooperation and security. One of the major obstacles is the divergent political systems and governance structures among member states. While some countries, such as Kenya and Tanzania, have relatively stable democratic systems, others, such as Burundi and South Sudan, have faced political turmoil, with armed conflicts and authoritarian leadership undermining regional stability (Bashir, 2018). These differences create tensions within the EAC and complicate efforts to establish a cohesive regional security framework.

Another challenge is the presence of non-state actors and armed groups that destabilize the region. For example, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a notorious rebel group, has operated in the borders of Uganda, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Similarly, the terrorist group al-Shabaab has posed a significant threat to regional security, particularly in Kenya and Uganda, through attacks and attempts to destabilize the region (Bashir, 2018). These transnational threats require a coordinated security approach among EAC member states, including intelligence sharing, joint military operations, and cross-border cooperation.

Furthermore, there are limitations to the EASF's capacity to handle large-scale conflicts. Although the force has undergone training and simulation exercises, it lacks the logistical support, funding, and political will from member states to execute full-scale peacekeeping missions (EAC, 2020). The inability to deploy the EASF effectively in real-world crises has exposed the limitations of the EAC's security architecture, necessitating further investment in the force's capacity and coordination with other regional and international actors.

In conclusion, while the EAC has made notable progress in fostering political cooperation and strengthening security mechanisms, challenges remain in fully realizing its regional integration goals. The EASF and other security initiatives provide a foundation for peacekeeping, but issues such as political divergence, internal conflicts, and limited resources continue to hinder the region's ability to address security challenges effectively. Moving forward, there is a need for enhanced political commitment, greater financial investment, and improved coordination between member states to ensure that the EAC can effectively address security issues and contribute to long-term stability and democratic governance in the region.

Challenges to Regional Integration

Economic Disparities

Economic disparities among the member states of the East African Community (EAC) have created significant challenges in fostering regional economic integration. The EAC's member countries, including Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Comoros, have differing levels of economic development that often manifest in imbalances in trade, investment, and infrastructure. These economic disparities are a result of varying historical, political, and social contexts within the member states. For instance, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda have relatively stable and growing economies compared to countries like Burundi and South Sudan, which have struggled with internal conflicts and political instability (Munyua, 2021).

The difference in economic development among member states leads to disagreements in trade and investment policies within the EAC. More developed countries, such as Kenya and Tanzania, often perceive themselves as bearing the burden of supporting less developed nations within the bloc, especially in the implementation of regional projects. These economically advanced nations argue that they contribute disproportionately to the community's budget and resources while receiving limited benefits in return, given the economic challenges faced by their less developed counterparts (Nyasimi, 2022). This has sometimes resulted in frustration and reluctance to fully embrace regional initiatives that may impose additional economic burdens, such as infrastructure development or social welfare programs.

At the same time, the less economically developed states within the EAC often feel marginalized and excluded from the benefits of regional economic integration. For example, countries like Burundi and South Sudan face significant challenges in accessing capital markets, attracting foreign investment, and developing basic infrastructure. The lack of a strong industrial base and limited human capital in these countries means they are unable to fully capitalize on the opportunities provided by the EAC's common market and customs union (Rugumayo, 2023). This has led to accusations from less developed nations that the more prosperous member states are not doing enough to address regional inequality, which undermines the spirit of cooperation and solidarity within the community.

In terms of trade, the economic imbalances have led to uneven trade flows between the member states. For example, Kenya and Tanzania, which have more developed industrial and agricultural sectors, dominate regional trade, while countries like Burundi and South Sudan struggle to compete. The imbalance in trade is exacerbated by the differences in infrastructure quality, with wealthier countries having better roads, ports, and communication networks that facilitate trade, while poorer countries lack the resources to develop these essential infrastructures (EAC Secretariat, 2023). The limited industrial capacity in some member states also means they are often relegated to being primary commodity exporters, while the more developed nations benefit from higher-value manufactured goods and services.

The disparities in economic development are further compounded by differences in domestic policies and governance structures. Countries like Rwanda and Kenya have made significant strides in improving business environments, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. In contrast, other EAC states, particularly those affected by political instability such as South Sudan and Burundi, struggle with governance issues that hamper economic growth and development. Corruption, weak institutions, and lack of infrastructure are common problems in these less developed nations, which make it harder for them to integrate into regional economic activities (World Bank, 2022). This discrepancy in governance has led to uneven participation in the EAC's development agenda.

In response to these challenges, the EAC has attempted to implement policies aimed at addressing the economic imbalances. The bloc has introduced mechanisms such as the East African Development Bank (EADB) and the East African Community Fund, designed to support infrastructure and development projects in the less developed member states. However, these efforts have not always been successful in bridging the economic gap, due to insufficient funding, poor coordination, and political resistance (East African Business Council, 2022). Furthermore, the limited capacity of these institutions to manage large-scale development projects has undermined their effectiveness in addressing the root causes of economic disparities in the region.

The unequal distribution of resources and benefits within the EAC has the potential to erode the spirit of regional cooperation. While the more developed countries in the bloc advocate for the liberalization of trade and the removal of barriers to the free movement of goods and services, the less developed nations often demand special treatment, including protectionist measures to shield their local industries. This tension has led to policy standoffs and slow progress in the creation of a true common market, as each state looks to safeguard its own economic interests (Munyua, 2021). These disagreements have also hindered efforts to harmonize tax policies and labor regulations across the region, further deepening economic disparities.

Looking forward, addressing the economic disparities within the EAC will require both political will and strategic policy interventions. It is essential for the member states to adopt more inclusive approaches that ensure the equitable distribution of the benefits of regional integration. This includes providing technical and financial support to the less developed countries, improving infrastructure connectivity across the region, and enhancing cooperation in sectors such as education, health, and technology. Furthermore, the EAC must focus on diversifying its economies, building local industries, and investing in human capital to reduce dependency on aid and external sources of funding (UNEP, 2022). With stronger commitment to regional integration and shared development goals, the EAC has the potential to overcome its economic disparities and build a more prosperous future for all its member states.

Non-Tariff Barriers

Non-tariff barriers (NTBs) have emerged as one of the most significant obstacles to trade in the globalized economy. While tariffs have largely been reduced or eliminated through international agreements and regional cooperation, NTBs continue to impede trade by increasing the cost of doing business, creating inefficiencies, and hindering market access. These barriers take various forms, including regulatory measures, bureaucratic hurdles, and arbitrary restrictions imposed by governments or local authorities. The lack of harmonized trade regulations, inconsistent customs procedures, and complex licensing systems are some of the most prominent NTBs that businesses face, especially in developing regions like East Africa (World Bank, 2021).

One of the most prevalent NTBs is cumbersome customs procedures. In many countries, customs procedures are complex, time-consuming, and lack transparency. Goods are often delayed at borders due to excessive paperwork, lengthy inspections, and inconsistent application of rules. This leads to significant delays in trade, especially for perishable goods, and increases transaction costs. According to the World Trade Organization (WTO), inefficient customs procedures in developing regions can result in an average delay of up to 10 days per shipment, adding considerable costs to businesses (WTO, 2020). In East Africa, where trade is a vital part of economic growth, such inefficiencies exacerbate the challenges faced by businesses looking to expand regionally or internationally (East African Business Council, 2022).

Arbitrary border regulations also contribute significantly to NTBs. These regulations are often subject to political influence, corruption, and discretion at the border points, creating an unpredictable trade environment. Inconsistent enforcement of regulations, such as arbitrary bans on specific imports or exports, arbitrary changes in tariffs, or the imposition of unofficial fees, complicate trade and undermine the confidence of traders and investors (OECD, 2020). The lack of uniformity across borders in East Africa, where several countries have similar yet slightly different trade regulations, can lead to confusion, delays, and increased costs for businesses involved in cross-border trade (Mutua & Maina, 2021).

The lack of harmonization of standards is another critical non-tariff barrier. Different countries have varying product standards, safety regulations, and quality control measures that hinder the free movement of goods. This lack of standardization forces exporters to adjust their products to meet the specific standards of each market, which increases production costs and leads to inefficiencies. For example, East African countries often have different packaging, labeling, and certification requirements, making it difficult for regional manufacturers to sell across borders without incurring additional costs (UNCTAD, 2021). Harmonizing product standards and certification procedures would reduce duplication of efforts, simplify trade, and create a more integrated regional market.

Moreover, NTBs often take the form of complex licensing and permit requirements. Many countries require businesses to obtain a variety of permits and licenses before they can import or export goods. These requirements are often burdensome and lack clear guidelines, leading to delays and increased business costs. In some cases, the process is further complicated by bureaucratic red tape and a lack of coordination between different government departments (Matunda, 2022). As a result, businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), may find it challenging to navigate the regulatory landscape and comply with the necessary requirements to engage in international trade (World Bank, 2022).

Regional integration initiatives, such as the East African Community (EAC), have made strides in reducing some NTBs through the implementation of the Common Market Protocol and other agreements aimed at creating a unified trading area. However, challenges persist due to the varying levels of political will and administrative capacity among member states. The harmonization of trade rules, regulations, and standards is still a work in progress, and non-tariff barriers continue to be a significant obstacle to achieving the goals of regional integration (East African Community, 2023). Countries within the EAC have different levels of infrastructure development and varying levels of commitment to policy reforms, which complicates the enforcement of regional trade agreements.

The persistence of non-tariff barriers also affects the broader goal of promoting intra-regional trade in Africa. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which aims to create a single market for goods and services across the continent, faces similar challenges in overcoming NTBs. Even though the agreement promises to reduce tariffs and trade barriers, non-tariff barriers remain a significant concern for traders and businesses seeking to benefit from the accord (Afreximbank, 2022). As a result, the removal of NTBs is considered a key priority for the successful implementation of AfCFTA and other regional trade initiatives. Without addressing these barriers, it is unlikely that trade within Africa will increase as anticipated.

To address the challenges posed by non-tariff barriers, governments and regional organizations need to prioritize regulatory reforms, improve customs procedures, and harmonize product standards. Efforts should be made to streamline customs procedures through digitalization and the adoption of simplified procedures, reducing delays and corruption. Furthermore, regional cooperation in standardization and certification of products could reduce the burden on businesses while improving market access (UNCTAD, 2021). In addition, transparency in border regulations and the elimination of arbitrary restrictions will go a long way in improving trade efficiency. Effective regional integration, underpinned by strong political will and commitment to economic reforms, is essential for overcoming the barriers that continue to hinder the growth of trade in Africa.

Political Will and Commitment

Political will and commitment are critical factors in the success of regional integration initiatives such as the East African Community (EAC). While political leaders in East Africa have publicly expressed support for regional cooperation, the degree of commitment to implementing integration policies and frameworks often varies. This inconsistency in political will has been one of the major challenges facing the EAC since its revival in 2000. Although the idea of a unified East African region offers significant potential benefits, such as economic growth, peace, and security, national interests often take precedence over collective regional objectives, which compromises the effectiveness of the integration process (Munyua, 2021).

The importance of political will in regional integration cannot be overstated. In a multilateral setting like the EAC, cooperation and collaboration among member states are necessary for the successful implementation of integration policies. However, national political interests, often influenced by internal power dynamics and electoral considerations, can hinder progress. For example, political leaders may prioritize national sovereignty or the preservation of domestic policies, which can limit the willingness to adopt regional agreements or allow for deeper integration. This is evident in the various delays in the implementation of key EAC projects, including the establishment of a common currency and a fully functional single market (East African Community, 2023).

In some cases, political leaders may not have the political will to implement agreements they have signed, as they may face domestic opposition or concerns from influential stakeholders within their countries. This has been particularly evident in the case of trade liberalization and the free movement of people within the EAC. While these are key pillars of regional integration, leaders may face resistance from local businesses, labor unions, or political parties, who fear that increased competition from other EAC countries could harm their national economies or job markets (Rugumayo, 2023). Consequently, these political considerations lead to inconsistencies in the implementation of integration policies.

Furthermore, political instability in some member states exacerbates the challenges to integration. For instance, countries like South Sudan and Burundi have experienced significant political instability and civil unrest in recent years, which has made it difficult for their leaders to fully commit to the EAC's integration agenda. In these contexts, the leadership is often preoccupied with managing internal conflicts and governance issues, leaving little room for regional cooperation (Munyua, 2021). The lack of political stability in these countries also diminishes the confidence of other member states in the ability of these nations to adhere to regional agreements and contribute effectively to the integration process.

In addition to internal political issues, the failure of political will is also linked to external pressures. The global political and economic environment has a direct impact on the priorities of national governments, sometimes resulting in a weakened commitment to regional integration. Economic challenges, such as the impact of global trade fluctuations or domestic economic crises, may push countries to focus more on immediate national concerns rather than long-term regional integration goals. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic led many countries to adopt protectionist measures, which slowed down the momentum of regional integration in East Africa (East African Business Council, 2022). The shift towards more nationalistic policies during such crises further undermines the political will to integrate at a regional level.

Despite these challenges, some progress has been made in building political will for regional integration within the EAC. Several leaders have shown a genuine commitment to advancing integration, recognizing the benefits of a unified East African market. The recent admission of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) into the EAC is one example of the region's political will to expand its influence and economic opportunities. The DRC's membership presents new opportunities for trade, security cooperation, and resource management, though it also introduces complexities regarding political alignment and national interests (East African Community, 2023). The successful inclusion of DRC in the EAC will depend on continued political commitment from all member states to overcome these challenges and maintain regional cohesion.

Moreover, regional organizations such as the EAC have recognized the importance of fostering a culture of political will at the national level to ensure the success of integration. Efforts to promote political engagement and dialogue between governments and other stakeholders, including civil society, business leaders, and the private sector, are essential in building mutual understanding and commitment to integration (UNEP, 2022). By addressing concerns at the national level and creating inclusive decision-making processes, the EAC can ensure that all member states feel equally invested in the integration agenda, which would increase the likelihood of successful implementation.

In conclusion, while there has been some progress in the political commitment of East African leaders to regional integration, the inconsistent nature of political will remains a major barrier to the EAC's success. National interests often conflict with regional objectives, resulting in delays, inefficiencies, and challenges in implementing integration policies. For the EAC to thrive, there needs to be a sustained effort to build political will through effective leadership, improved governance, and stronger regional cooperation. Without such commitment, the potential benefits of integration—such as economic prosperity, peace, and security—may remain elusive for the people of East Africa (World Bank, 2022).

Infrastructure Gaps

Infrastructure development is a critical component of regional integration within the East African Community (EAC), yet significant gaps remain that hinder economic growth and regional cooperation. While the EAC has made notable progress in certain areas such as roads, railways, and energy, challenges persist in bridging the infrastructure divide between member states. The lack of connectivity between key regions, especially in the energy and transport sectors, continues to constrain the full realization of the community's potential (EAC Secretariat, 2023). For example, while the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) has become a key infrastructure project in Kenya and Tanzania, its implementation across all member states remains incomplete, which limits the movement of goods and people within the region (Mutiso & Kipyego, 2022).

In the transport sector, the SGR is a flagship project intended to improve regional connectivity by enhancing the movement of goods from port cities like Mombasa in Kenya to neighboring countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan. However, several member states have not yet adopted the SGR, leaving gaps in regional rail transport infrastructure. As of 2023, only Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania have made significant strides in constructing the railway, while other members such as Burundi, South Sudan, and Rwanda still lack comprehensive rail networks (Rugumayo, 2023). This disparity leads to delays and inefficiencies in trade, as goods must be transported by road or through outdated rail systems, which are less cost-effective and slower.

Additionally, the energy sector in the EAC faces challenges in terms of interconnectivity and capacity. While there has been some progress in regional energy projects such as the East African Power Pool (EAPP), which aims to interconnect national grids to enable electricity trade, significant gaps remain, especially in rural and remote areas. Several EAC member states still rely heavily on traditional energy sources such as biomass and kerosene, with limited access to modern, renewable energy alternatives (Kenya Power & Lighting Company, 2022). The lack of reliable and affordable energy in many parts of the region hinders industrialization and the development of key sectors like manufacturing and agriculture, which are vital to the region's economic growth.

Energy interconnections are particularly underdeveloped in countries such as South Sudan and Burundi, where the national grid infrastructure is weak and unreliable. For instance, while Kenya and Uganda have made strides in creating a more interconnected grid, other members like South Sudan and Burundi still lack the infrastructure to fully participate in regional energy trade. This energy gap limits the potential for cross-border electricity exchange, which could help address power shortages and reduce costs for businesses in the region (African Development Bank, 2021). Without adequate energy supply and distribution networks, the EAC risks missing out on the benefits of regional integration, such as reduced energy costs and improved industrial output.

Another major gap in infrastructure within the EAC is in the road network. Although road connectivity has improved over the years, much of the region still lacks a comprehensive road network linking rural areas with urban centers, and critical border crossing points remain poorly connected (World Bank, 2022). The East African road network is often described as fragmented, with many roads in rural areas remaining unpaved or poorly maintained, making transportation difficult and costly. Furthermore, the absence of key cross-border highways, such as the central corridor linking the DRC to Tanzania, creates barriers for trade and regional integration. As a result, goods are often delayed, and transport costs remain high, which negatively impacts the competitiveness of East African economies.

The insufficient development of regional ports is another area contributing to infrastructure gaps within the EAC. Ports such as Mombasa and Dar es Salaam are key trade gateways for several countries, but congestion and inefficiencies at these ports often result in delays and increased shipping costs. Moreover, not all EAC member states have access to maritime trade routes, limiting their participation in international trade. For example, South Sudan, a landlocked country, relies heavily on the Port of Mombasa in Kenya for its imports and exports, but the infrastructure supporting this trade route is often stretched and inadequate for handling the growing volumes of trade (EAC Secretariat, 2023). There is a need for increased investment in port infrastructure and modernized port management systems to address these challenges.

The lack of adequate infrastructure has a direct impact on regional trade, as many EAC member states still face significant barriers to economic integration. According to the East African Business Council (2022), poor infrastructure limits market access, increases transaction costs, and discourages investment in the region. The implementation of the EAC's Common Market Protocol is hampered by infrastructure gaps that make it difficult for businesses to operate efficiently across borders. These inefficiencies are particularly felt in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing, where timely delivery of goods is critical. In addition, the underdevelopment of logistics and transportation infrastructure further exacerbates the region's trade challenges, creating a vicious cycle of low regional trade volumes and slow economic growth (East African Business Council, 2022).

Addressing these infrastructure gaps is crucial for unlocking the full potential of the EAC and ensuring that the region can achieve its goals of economic integration and sustainable development. The EAC has recognized the importance of infrastructure development and has made strides in advancing projects such as the EAPP and the Road Development Master Plan. However, the successful completion and expansion of these initiatives will require continued political commitment, increased investment, and enhanced regional cooperation (UNCTAD, 2022). It is essential for the EAC to prioritize infrastructure development in the next phase of its integration process, focusing on bridging the gaps in transport, energy, and logistics networks to foster a more competitive and integrated regional economy.

Conflicts within the EAC

The East African Community (EAC) has faced numerous conflicts that have threatened regional stability, economic development, and cooperation. One of the most pressing issues has been the persistent instability in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which has had a spillover effect on neighboring EAC member states. The conflicts in this region are fueled by ethnic tensions, resource competition, and the presence of various rebel groups, particularly the March 23 Movement (M23). Efforts to mediate and bring peace to the region have involved multiple diplomatic initiatives, including the Nairobi, Luanda, and Dar es Salaam initiatives, as well as intervention by the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Conflicts within the East African Community, particularly in eastern DRC, continue to pose serious challenges to regional stability. The resurgence of armed groups, tensions between Rwanda and the DRC, and the complexities of regional diplomacy have made peace efforts difficult to sustain. While initiatives such as the Nairobi, Luanda, and Dar es Salaam peace processes, along with SADC's involvement, have aimed to address these issues, lasting peace remains elusive. A comprehensive and coordinated regional approach that addresses the root causes of conflict, strengthens governance in the DRC, and enhances security cooperation among EAC member states is essential for achieving long-term stability.

In the broader context of regional security, the issue of terrorism, particularly from extremist groups like Al-Shabaab, has added to the complexity of conflicts in East Africa. Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda have been at the forefront of the fight against Al-Shabaab, which operates primarily from Somalia. The group's attacks on Kenyan soil, including the 2013 Westgate Mall attack and the 2015 Garissa University attack, have heightened tensions between the countries and posed a challenge to the collective security efforts within the region.

Furthermore, the issue of border disputes and the division of natural resources continues to contribute to regional instability. In particular, the maritime border disputes between Kenya and Somalia have caused diplomatic rifts. Somalia has taken Kenya to the International Court of Justice over the demarcation of maritime boundaries in the Indian Ocean, an area believed to hold significant oil and gas reserves. The outcome of this case will have far-reaching implications not only for the bilateral relationship between Kenya and Somalia but also for the wider East African region.

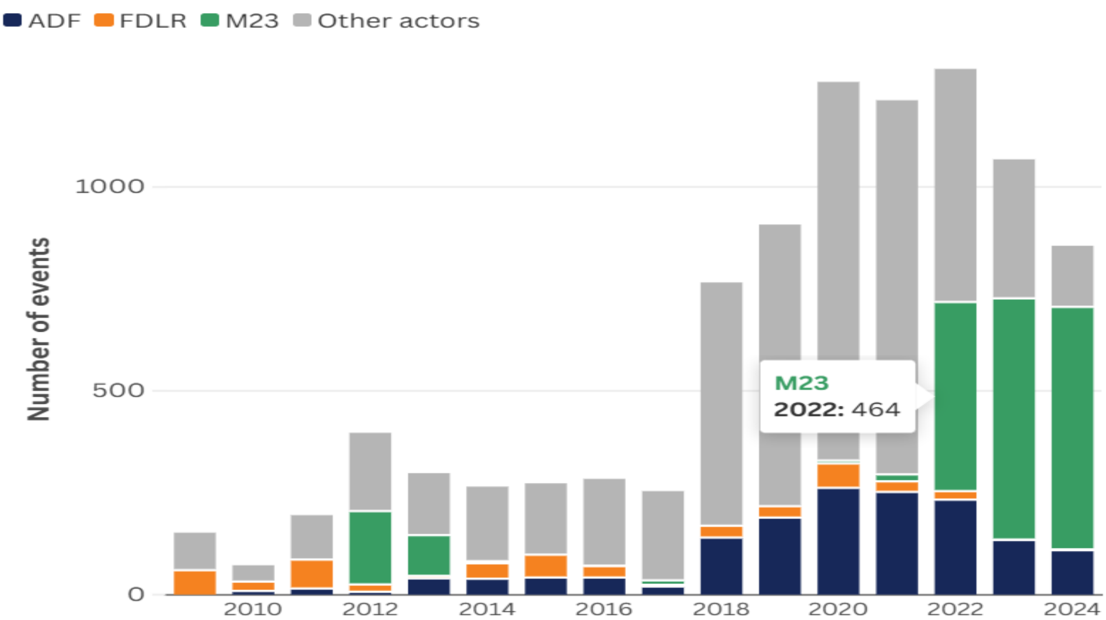
Despite these challenges, the EAC has made efforts to foster regional cooperation and peace through diplomatic initiatives and peacekeeping efforts. The East African Standby Force (EASF) has been instrumental in addressing regional conflicts, including intervening in the South Sudanese civil war and providing humanitarian assistance to refugees fleeing conflicts in neighboring countries. Additionally, the EAC has worked towards strengthening its conflict prevention mechanisms, although the success of these initiatives remains limited due to ongoing political and economic challenges within member states.

Rebellion in Eastern Congo

In early 2025, violent clashes between the Congolese security forces and the M23 rebel group escalated sharply, leading to M23’s takeover of Goma, a key city in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) near the Rwandan border. Rwanda, widely believed to be the main supporter of M23, reinforced the group’s military operations by deploying thousands of troops. As the conflict intensified, thousands of people—many of whom were already internally displaced—were forced to flee the area. On February 4, M23 declared a unilateral ceasefire, but the offensive resulted in significant casualties, with estimates ranging from 900, according to the United Nations, to 2,000, based on Congolese government reports. M23 is just one in a long line of Rwandan-backed rebel movements that have sought control over territory and valuable resources in eastern DRC since the late 1990s. The crisis in Goma fueled broader political unrest across the country, particularly in the capital, Kinshasa, in the wake of DRC’s disputed December 2023 national elections. With approximately one million Congolese fleeing to neighboring countries and 21 million people requiring urgent humanitarian assistance, the situation in the DRC remains one of the most severe crises globally.

The roots of the ongoing conflict trace back to 1996, when war erupted in eastern DRC, contributing to an estimated six million deaths. The First Congo War (1996–1997) followed the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide against Tutsi, in which extremist Hutu militias killed around one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus. After the genocide, nearly two million Hutus, including former genocidaires, fled into DRC's North and South Kivu provinces, where some of them formed armed groups. In response, Rwanda's new Tutsi-led government, under the leadership of President Paul Kagame, backed Congolese Tutsi militias and invaded Zaire (as DRC was then called), toppling Mobutu Sese Seko's regime in 1997 with the help of Laurent Kabila, who subsequently became the country's president. However, Kabila's ties with Rwanda deteriorated, and in 1998, he expelled Rwandan troops, reigniting conflict. This Second Congo War (1998–2002) saw shifting alliances and international involvement, with Rwanda and Uganda supporting rebel forces against Kabila's government, while Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe backed Kinshasa. The war, which led to massive civilian casualties and humanitarian devastation, formally ended in 2002, although violence in eastern DRC continued in various forms, with numerous rebel groups, including M23, emerging to contest control over resource-rich areas.

Despite peace agreements and United Nations peacekeeping efforts, instability persisted in eastern DRC, exacerbated by the region's lucrative mineral reserves, which have drawn both local and foreign actors into the conflict. The March 23 Movement (M23), composed primarily of Tutsi fighters, first gained prominence in 2012, launching a military campaign against the Congolese government with alleged backing from Rwanda. Although it was defeated by a UN-backed offensive in 2013, M23 resurfaced in 2022, seizing significant territory in North Kivu province by mid-2023. The crisis has also been shaped by broader geopolitical interests, particularly China's dominance in DRC's mining sector. Over the past two decades, Chinese companies have secured control over key cobalt, copper, and uranium mines, which are critical to global technology and energy industries. Meanwhile, the Congolese government has relied on Chinese military support, including drones and weapons, to combat M23. The complex interplay of regional rivalries, resource exploitation, and foreign interests has prolonged instability in eastern DRC, heightening the risk of a wider regional conflict akin to the devastating Congo Wars of the past.



Political violence events in the Eastern DRC*: 2009-2024

(Source: ACLED • *Defined as the Nord-Kivu province in the DRC). Events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence, and violence against civilians were included. Listed groups were involved in events but were not necessarily the aggressors.

Eastern DRC: Unpacking the Difficult Task of Regional Diplomacy

The Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains one of the most complex geopolitical flashpoints in Africa, where regional diplomacy faces immense challenges in fostering stability. The region has been plagued by armed conflicts, fueled by ethnic tensions, competition over vast mineral resources, and the involvement of numerous foreign actors. Various rebel groups, such as the M23 and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), continue to destabilize the area, leading to humanitarian crises and displacements. Efforts by regional bodies, including the African Union (AU) and the East African Community (EAC), alongside neighboring countries like Rwanda and Uganda, have attempted to mediate peace, yet deep-seated mistrust and historical grievances complicate negotiations.

One of the major obstacles in resolving the crisis is the intricate web of political and economic interests that regional actors hold in the DRC. Countries such as Rwanda and Uganda have been accused of backing armed groups within the region, either for strategic influence or economic gain from illicit trade in minerals. On the other hand, Kinshasa has struggled to assert control over its eastern provinces, relying on international peacekeeping forces such as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO). While diplomatic initiatives like the Nairobi and Luanda processes have aimed to broker ceasefires and encourage dialogue, fragile agreements often collapse due to renewed hostilities and violations of territorial sovereignty.

The road to sustainable peace in Eastern DRC requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond military interventions and temporary peace accords. Strengthening governance within the DRC, fostering economic cooperation among regional states, and addressing the root causes of conflict—such as poverty, weak institutions, and marginalization—are essential for long-term stability. Furthermore, effective regional diplomacy must prioritize trust-building mechanisms, transparent negotiations, and accountability for external interference. Without a concerted effort from all stakeholders, the DRC will remain a battleground of competing interests, prolonging the suffering of millions and undermining the prospects for lasting peace.

The Nairobi Initiative

The Nairobi Initiative, spearheaded by the East African Community, was launched as a diplomatic effort to address the insecurity in eastern DRC. The initiative involved peace talks held in Nairobi, Kenya, bringing together representatives of the Congolese government, rebel groups, and regional stakeholders. The primary goal of the initiative was to promote dialogue, facilitate ceasefire agreements, and lay the groundwork for the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of rebel fighters. Despite the efforts made under the Nairobi Initiative, challenges remain due to the lack of trust between the Congolese government and the armed groups, as well as the difficulty in enforcing peace agreements on the ground. Some rebel factions have refused to participate, while others have continued fighting despite ongoing negotiations.

The East African Community (EAC) aimed to address the ongoing insecurity in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) by deploying a Regional Force (EACRF) in November 2022, composed of troops from Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda. Despite the EAC's efforts, the deployment faced significant challenges due to the competing interests of some EAC member states. The force was initially envisioned to play a peacekeeping role, helping to facilitate the withdrawal of armed groups, notably the M23, while supporting ongoing dialogue through the Nairobi Process, facilitated by former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta.

However, the EACRF's mandate became a point of contention. While the EAC hoped to use the force for peacekeeping and stabilization, the Congolese government was dissatisfied with its inability to provide direct military support to the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) against the M23 rebels. This led to the Congolese government's decision not to extend the EACRF’s mandate and seek support from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) instead. As the situation in eastern DRC continued to deteriorate, the EAC convened an extraordinary summit on 29 January 2025, calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities, direct peace talks between the Congolese government and the M23, and a joint EAC-SADC meeting.

However, despite these efforts, Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi, who had previously resisted engaging in dialogue with the M23, declined to attend the EAC summit, signaling a continued reluctance to negotiate with the rebel group. The complexities of the situation highlight the challenges the EAC faces in balancing the conflicting priorities of its member states and the DRC's sovereign interests.

The Luanda Initiative

The Luanda Initiative is a diplomatic and peace-building initiative launched in 2013 to address the ongoing conflicts in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The initiative was driven by Angola’s President José Eduardo dos Santos and aimed at fostering stability through dialogue, cooperation, and conflict resolution. The initiative emerged in the context of the protracted violence in eastern DRC, where rebel groups and armed militias, such as the M23, continued to destabilize the region. The Luanda Initiative sought to create a framework for a peaceful resolution of conflicts, promoting cooperation between DRC and its neighbors.

The initiative primarily focused on improving relations between the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda, countries that had been involved in the conflict due to their support for different armed groups operating in the region. Tensions between these countries had escalated over the years, with accusations of interference in each other’s internal affairs and support for various rebel groups. The Luanda Initiative sought to mediate these tensions, encourage dialogue, and address the underlying causes of the regional conflict, such as resource control, ethnic rivalries, and governance challenges.

One of the core aspects of the Luanda Initiative was the establishment of a framework for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of rebel groups operating in the DRC. This process was seen as critical for ensuring the long-term stability of the region, as it would reduce the power of armed groups and facilitate the return of displaced populations to their homes. The initiative also emphasized the importance of respecting international borders and refraining from any military action that could further destabilize the region. To this end, Angola, alongside other regional players and international actors, worked to foster regional cooperation in securing peace.

In addition to focusing on security and military concerns, the Luanda Initiative also addressed the economic and developmental needs of the region. The initiative underscored the need for sustainable development, poverty reduction, and regional economic integration to create a more stable and prosperous environment for the people of the Great Lakes region. This included strengthening infrastructure, improving trade relations, and fostering investments in sectors such as agriculture, energy, and tourism. The economic aspect of the Luanda Initiative was seen as a way to complement the security efforts and build long-term stability through shared prosperity.

While the Luanda Initiative made significant strides in promoting dialogue and conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region, it faced numerous challenges. These included deep-rooted mistrust between neighboring countries, the resilience of armed groups, and political instability in some of the countries involved. Despite these obstacles, the initiative remains a key example of regional diplomacy aimed at tackling the complex, multi-dimensional conflicts in Africa, and continues to influence ongoing peace efforts in the region.

The Dar es Salaam EAC/ SADC Joint Summit

On February 8 2025 leaders from the EAC and SADC held a joint summit in Dares salaam to address the escalating crisis in Eastern of DRC calling for ceasefire and lasting solutions. The Dar es Salaam meeting between the East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) held to address issues between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) marked an important diplomatic step toward resolving long-standing tensions. This meeting, convened in Tanzania’s commercial capital, was a key forum for both regional blocs to engage in discussions and forge solutions regarding the complex relationship between Rwanda and the DRC, which has been shaped by a series of historical, political, and security challenges.

Rwanda and the DRC have been engaged in a strained relationship for decades, largely due to the presence of armed rebel groups operating in the eastern part of the DRC. One of the most prominent of these groups, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), has been accused by Rwanda of being responsible for the 1994 genocide. The DRC, on the other hand, has long accused Rwanda of supporting rebel factions within its borders, exacerbating regional insecurity. The Dar es Salaam meeting provided an opportunity for both Rwanda and the DRC, with the support of the EAC and SADC, to address these ongoing security concerns and explore avenues for greater cooperation.

At the heart of the discussions was the need for both countries to find common ground on issues related to border security, the presence of rebel groups, and the broader implications for regional stability. One of the key outcomes of the meeting was a call for the cessation of hostilities and for both parties to engage in dialogue under the auspices of the EAC, with the aim of finding lasting solutions to the crisis. The EAC, as a regional body, emphasized the importance of maintaining peace and security in the Great Lakes region, recognizing that the instability in the DRC has far-reaching effects on its neighbors, including Rwanda.

The meeting also highlighted the role of the SADC in supporting the peace efforts. SADC's involvement was crucial, particularly given the broader regional context and the impact of the DRC's instability on neighboring countries in Southern Africa. SADC has been actively engaged in peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts in the DRC, and its contribution to the peace process is seen as an essential aspect of finding a long-term resolution to the conflict. The Dar es Salaam talks provided an opportunity for both regional organizations to align their efforts and work together more effectively.

Another significant aspect of the meeting was the recognition of the humanitarian crisis that the conflict has triggered. Millions of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been affected by the violence in the eastern DRC, and neighboring countries, including Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania, have been forced to cope with the spillover effects. The meeting underscored the need for a coordinated response to address the humanitarian situation, with both EAC and SADC pledging to support efforts to provide aid to those affected by the ongoing conflict.

The Dar es Salaam meeting also saw the reaffirmation of commitments to the integration of the region's peace and security mechanisms. Both EAC and SADC leaders recognized that regional cooperation is essential for addressing the complex and interconnected nature of conflicts in the Great Lakes region. Strengthening collaboration between the two organizations is seen as a critical step in addressing the root causes of conflict, such as political instability, economic disparities, and ethnic tensions. This cooperation could serve as a model for resolving other conflicts within the region.

In conclusion, the Dar es Salaam meeting represented a crucial step toward fostering dialogue between Rwanda and the DRC under the frameworks of the EAC and SADC. It highlighted the importance of regional collaboration in addressing cross-border conflicts and the need for sustained diplomatic efforts to promote peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. The challenges between Rwanda and the DRC are not easily resolved, but the Dar es Salaam talks provided a platform for renewed hope and the possibility of a peaceful resolution, supported by regional and international partners.

Tensions over Trade Imbalances

Trade imbalances refer to the difference between a country's imports and exports. When a nation imports more than it exports, it runs a trade deficit; when it exports more than it imports, it runs a trade surplus. The persistence of trade imbalances has become a central issue in global economic discussions, as countries and policymakers analyze their causes, consequences, and potential solutions. Trade imbalances are often a source of tension between nations, as they can lead to economic inequality, currency manipulation allegations, and geopolitical disputes (Bown & Irwin, 2020). While some argue that trade imbalances are a natural outcome of global markets, others view them as indicative of unfair trade practices, often exacerbated by protectionist policies or trade wars.

One of the significant factors contributing to trade imbalances is the difference in national savings rates. In countries where savings rates are low, the demand for foreign goods tends to outpace domestic production capabilities, leading to higher imports. Conversely, countries with high savings rates often find themselves with surpluses because they have the capital to invest in foreign markets. The United States, for example, has run a significant trade deficit for decades, primarily due to its low savings rate and high consumer demand (Cohen, 2021). This situation has led to growing concerns in the U.S. about the sustainability of its trade deficit and its dependence on foreign capital inflows to finance it.

Another key factor contributing to trade imbalances is exchange rate policies. Countries with undervalued currencies often gain a competitive advantage in international markets by making their exports cheaper and imports more expensive. This can create a situation where a nation’s trade surplus is artificially inflated, while the trading partners experience deficits. For example, China has long been accused of manipulating its currency to maintain a trade surplus with the U.S. and other nations (Cheung, Chinn, & Fujii, 2020). This practice has led to tensions between China and its trading partners, particularly the U.S., which has consistently criticized China’s currency manipulation and its impact on global trade.

In the context of international trade agreements, trade imbalances can also lead to political and economic friction. Nations with persistent trade deficits often seek to address imbalances through trade negotiations, arguing that their partners' policies are unfair or detrimental to their economic health. For instance, the U.S. has long sought to reduce its trade deficit with China through tariffs and other measures, culminating in the trade war initiated during the Trump administration (Bown & Irwin, 2020). While trade imbalances are not the sole cause of these trade wars, they play a central role in shaping the narrative of unfair trade practices and protectionism.

Trade imbalances can also have serious implications for domestic industries. Countries with significant trade deficits may see the decline of key industries, as cheaper foreign goods outcompete local products. This has been particularly evident in manufacturing sectors, where outsourcing production to countries with lower labor costs leads to job losses and reduced economic activity in the home country. The rise of the "deindustrialization" trend in many advanced economies has been closely tied to persistent trade imbalances, especially with emerging economies like China and India (Rodrik, 2020). This has fueled political backlash in countries such as the U.S. and the U.K., where discontent over trade imbalances has contributed to the rise of populist movements.

The global nature of trade imbalances means that their effects extend far beyond bilateral trade relations. Large trade imbalances in major economies, such as the U.S. and China, can ripple through the global economy, affecting other countries' trade policies and economic stability. For example, the global financial crisis of 2008 was partially caused by the massive trade deficits accumulated by the U.S. and the surpluses amassed by countries like China and Germany (Mann, 2021). These imbalances contributed to the buildup of unsustainable debt levels and the subsequent collapse of financial markets, highlighting the interconnectedness of global trade and financial systems.

Moreover, trade imbalances can exacerbate income inequality within countries. When countries experience long-term trade deficits, they often face downward pressure on wages and employment in certain sectors. Conversely, countries with trade surpluses may see rising incomes in their export sectors, but this can lead to greater economic disparities as sectors that do not benefit from the surplus experience stagnation. This inequality can further fuel political polarization, as citizens in affected sectors demand protectionist policies to shield their industries from foreign competition (Acemoglu, 2020). Thus, trade imbalances are not just economic issues; they have social and political dimensions that can influence the broader policy landscape.

In conclusion, tensions over trade imbalances remain a significant challenge in the global economy. While some argue that trade imbalances are a natural consequence of global markets, others see them as problematic, particularly when they are driven by unfair trade practices or currency manipulation. The economic, political, and social impacts of trade imbalances are far-reaching, and addressing them requires cooperation among nations to reform global trade systems, promote fair competition, and mitigate the negative consequences for domestic industries and workers. Moving forward, countries must find ways to address trade imbalances that balance national interests with global economic stability, ensuring that trade benefits all parties involved.

Political and Border Disputes

Political and border disputes have been a persistent challenge in many regions of the world, and East Africa is no exception. The East African region, with its diverse political systems, cultures, and historical contexts, has witnessed numerous border and political disputes over the years. These disputes often arise due to colonial legacies, competition for resources, ethnic divisions, and geopolitical interests. Despite efforts to foster cooperation and integration through regional organizations such as the East African Community (EAC), these disputes have at times undermined regional stability and development. Understanding the sources and dynamics of these disputes is essential for assessing the potential for lasting peace and cooperation in East Africa (Kinyanjui, 2021).

One of the key sources of political and border disputes in East Africa lies in the colonial history of the region. The arbitrary drawing of borders during the colonial era did not take into account the cultural, ethnic, and political realities on the ground. This has led to lingering disputes over territory and governance. For instance, the ongoing dispute between Uganda and Rwanda over the shared border region, especially concerning the control of the Rubavu area, can be traced to these colonial-era boundary decisions (Munyoro, 2022). Similarly, the long-standing tensions between Kenya and Somalia over the border region in the Indian Ocean, specifically the controversial maritime boundary dispute, stems from poorly demarcated borders during colonial rule (Nairobi News, 2023).

Another significant factor contributing to political and border disputes in the region is competition for resources, particularly land and water. East Africa is home to a range of valuable natural resources, including fertile agricultural land, minerals, and oil reserves. Disputes over these resources often trigger territorial conflicts. For example, the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which lasted from 1998 to 2000, was partially fueled by the desire to control valuable borderland areas rich in resources (Hansen, 2020). Similarly, South Sudan's independence from Sudan in 2011 was influenced by access to oil-rich regions, leading to ongoing disputes over borders and resource allocation (Deng, 2022).

Ethnic divisions within and between countries in East Africa have also played a central role in political disputes. Ethnic groups often view borders as arbitrary and, in some cases, divisive. In Kenya, for instance, the marginalization of certain ethnic groups has fueled internal political conflict, with some groups demanding autonomy or greater representation. Similarly, in Sudan, the conflict between Arab and African ethnic groups, most notably in the Darfur region, has led to protracted political and border disputes (Elhaj, 2021). These ethnic tensions have frequently been exacerbated by political elites seeking to exploit these divisions for their own gain, further complicating efforts at peacebuilding.

The political instability that often accompanies border disputes in East Africa can also be attributed to the influence of foreign powers and regional actors. Many countries in the region are strategically located, making them important for regional and international geopolitics. In the case of Somalia, the involvement of various foreign nations in the conflict over the country's borders and sovereignty has had significant implications for its stability. In recent years, countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti have been involved in military and diplomatic efforts aimed at stabilizing Somalia, often with differing interests that complicate the situation (Lind, 2022). Similarly, the rivalry between Uganda and Rwanda has drawn in international actors, particularly given the shared concerns over security and resource management in the Great Lakes region.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve border and political disputes in East Africa have been ongoing, but success has been limited. The African Union (AU), through its mechanisms such as the Peace and Security Council, has attempted to mediate in conflicts such as the Ethiopia-Eritrea border war and the South Sudan conflict. However, these efforts have often been hampered by the political will of the governments involved and by the complexities of the disputes themselves (AUC, 2023). For example, the resolution of the maritime border dispute between Kenya and Somalia has faced delays despite numerous rounds of negotiation, highlighting the challenges inherent in resolving political and territorial conflicts in the region (Munyoro, 2022).

Despite these challenges, regional organizations such as the East African Community (EAC) have played a crucial role in promoting dialogue and encouraging peaceful dispute resolution. The EAC, for instance, has facilitated talks between Rwanda and Uganda, aiming to de-escalate tensions and promote cooperation. Moreover, the EAC has been instrumental in advancing regional integration efforts, which can reduce the potential for conflict by fostering economic interdependence among member states. However, the success of such initiatives depends on the commitment of member states to prioritize regional cooperation over national interests (Kinyanjui, 2021).

Looking ahead, addressing political and border disputes in East Africa will require sustained diplomatic engagement, regional cooperation, and a focus on addressing underlying socioeconomic issues such as poverty and inequality. The establishment of stronger regional frameworks for conflict resolution and the promotion of inclusive political systems will be crucial for minimizing the risk of violent conflicts. In addition, the role of civil society and grassroots movements in advocating for peace and cooperation cannot be underestimated. With the right combination of political will, diplomatic effort, and regional solidarity, East Africa can move toward a more peaceful and stable future (Munyoro, 2022).

Disagreements over Regional Leadership

Disagreements over regional leadership within the East African Community (EAC) have been a persistent issue, contributing to tensions among member states and influencing the effectiveness of regional integration. Some member states have expressed dissatisfaction with the EAC Secretariat's leadership style, arguing that it fails to adequately represent their interests in key decisions. This discontent has often resulted in divergent views on the direction of the EAC, as some countries believe that leadership is overly concentrated in a few states, undermining the principle of equal partnership. Such concerns have led to calls for a more inclusive leadership structure that ensures all member states have a more significant voice in decision-making (Kibirige, 2022).

A major point of contention is the influence exerted by more powerful member states, particularly Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, on the decision-making processes of the EAC. These states, due to their larger economies and more developed infrastructures, are often seen as having a disproportionate say in regional matters. Smaller members, such as Burundi and Rwanda, have at times expressed frustration with what they perceive as a lack of consideration for their concerns in major decisions. The concentration of decision-making power in these larger states has exacerbated feelings of marginalization among the smaller member states, leading to an uneven distribution of authority within the community (Oduor, 2021).

The issue of regional leadership became even more pronounced with the accession of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to the EAC in 2022. The DRC's membership has complicated the leadership dynamics due to its large population, rich natural resources, and strategic position within Central Africa. While the DRC's inclusion is seen as an opportunity to enhance regional influence and economic growth, it has also led to concerns about the balance of power within the EAC. Some member states fear that the DRC's entrance may shift the power dynamics in favor of larger, more resource-rich countries, potentially sidelining the smaller East African nations that have long been at the core of the EAC (East African Community Secretariat, 2023).

Another factor fueling disagreements over leadership is the decision-making process itself. The EAC operates under a system where decisions are often made through consensus among member states, which can be a double-edged sword. While consensus-building is crucial for maintaining unity, it can also lead to deadlock when countries with divergent interests disagree on key issues. The slow pace of decision-making in such a system has frustrated many, particularly when urgent matters, such as security cooperation or trade agreements, require swift action. Critics argue that this decision-making process, coupled with the Secretariat's leadership style, has sometimes resulted in inefficiency and a lack of accountability, undermining the EAC's goals of regional integration (Kinyanjui, 2021).

Moreover, the leadership style of the EAC Secretariat has been described as somewhat bureaucratic and top-down, which has further alienated some member states. The Secretariat, based in Arusha, Tanzania, is responsible for coordinating the implementation of EAC policies and initiatives, but its leadership has been criticized for being overly centralized and detached from the specific needs of individual member states. Some countries have voiced concerns that the Secretariat’s leadership is not adequately responsive to regional challenges, particularly in areas such as infrastructure development and regional security, where more localized leadership could be more effective. This centralized approach has led to tensions between the EAC Secretariat and the national governments, who sometimes feel that their sovereignty is being undermined (Kibirige, 2022).

A significant manifestation of the leadership disagreement within the EAC is the difficulty in advancing the political federation agenda. The political federation, which aims to unite member states into a single political entity, has faced numerous challenges, with leadership disagreements often at the heart of the delays. Some member states, particularly Kenya and Tanzania, have expressed caution about losing sovereignty to a central EAC government, while others, such as Uganda and Rwanda, have been more proactive in advocating for the federation. The conflicting views on the political federation have made it difficult for the EAC to move forward in its integration process, with member states unable to agree on the structure and authority of the envisioned federal government (East African Community Secretariat, 2023).

Security cooperation within the EAC has also been impacted by regional leadership disagreements. In response to security challenges, including terrorism and internal conflicts, the EAC has sought to establish a unified security framework. However, differing leadership approaches among member states have created obstacles to effective collaboration. For instance, Uganda and Kenya have been more active in contributing to regional peacekeeping missions, such as those in South Sudan and Somalia, while other countries, such as Tanzania, have been less enthusiastic about regional military interventions. This lack of consensus on the role of military intervention and peacekeeping operations in the region is a direct reflection of the broader leadership struggles within the EAC, which undermine its ability to present a unified front on security issues (Kinyanjui, 2021).

Despite these challenges, the EAC continues to make efforts to address leadership disagreements and promote greater unity among member states. The introduction of more inclusive leadership models and the expansion of regional dialogue have been proposed as ways to mitigate conflicts. Additionally, the EAC has been working on strengthening its decision-making processes to ensure that all member states have a more equitable role in shaping the community’s policies. The success of these efforts will depend largely on the willingness of member states to compromise and prioritize the collective interests of the region over individual national concerns (Oduor, 2021).

Security Concerns

The issue of regional leadership within the East African Community (EAC) has been a significant source of tension among its member states. The leadership structure of the EAC is designed to foster unity and cooperation, but disagreements over regional leadership and decision-making authority have led to conflicts within the organization. Member states, particularly those with larger economies such as Kenya and Tanzania, often express dissatisfaction with what they perceive as an imbalance of power in the decision-making processes, feeling that they are either sidelined or overruled by the leadership style of the EAC Secretariat (Odhiambo, 2023). These leadership disputes have complicated the region's efforts to achieve greater integration and undermine the community's long-term goals.

At the heart of these leadership disagreements is the centralization of power within the EAC Secretariat, which some member states argue reduces their ability to influence regional decisions. The Secretariat, responsible for coordinating the day-to-day activities of the EAC, is often seen as too powerful, with decision-making authority that does not always align with the interests of all member states. This centralization can lead to frustration among countries that feel their voices are not adequately represented in major decisions, especially when it comes to critical issues such as trade policies, infrastructure projects, and security interventions (Kiprono, 2022). Smaller countries, such as Burundi and Rwanda, also often express concerns that the Secretariat favors larger economies in the region, leading to an uneven distribution of benefits from regional initiatives.

One prominent example of leadership tensions occurred in 2019 when the EAC's decision-making process was questioned by member states in relation to the integration of South Sudan into the community. Some member states were hesitant about the rapid accession of South Sudan, citing concerns about its political instability and security issues. This debate over South Sudan's membership raised larger questions about the decision-making power of the EAC Secretariat and the balance of influence between member states in shaping the future of the region (Ochieng, 2020). The lack of a transparent and inclusive approach to such decisions exacerbated feelings of discontent and mistrust among the member states, deepening regional divisions.

In addition to disagreements over political decisions, disputes over leadership have also been evident in the EAC's economic integration efforts. For instance, the establishment of the EAC Common Market faced delays and disagreements, with member states questioning how the economic policies and benefits would be distributed. Tanzania, for example, has been particularly resistant to certain aspects of economic integration, citing concerns over the impact on its sovereignty and domestic industries. The leadership style of the EAC Secretariat, often perceived as top-down and insufficiently consultative, has been a contributing factor in these economic disagreements (Mutabazi, 2021). This has slowed the region's progress toward creating a more integrated and competitive economic bloc, as countries continue to seek greater control over economic decisions.

The leadership issue has also affected the EAC's capacity to address regional security challenges. For example, in the context of the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, disagreements over how to approach the peace process have highlighted the lack of consensus on leadership roles within the EAC. Some member states have pushed for more direct intervention, while others have called for a more diplomatic approach, leading to a fractured response. The Secretariat's role in coordinating peacekeeping efforts in such conflicts has often been questioned, with member states doubting its effectiveness and impartiality (Kinyanjui, 2021). These security-related leadership disputes have created challenges in establishing a unified front against regional instability.

Another key factor in the leadership tensions is the historical legacy of competing national interests within the region. The EAC's member states, though geographically close, have distinct political systems, economic priorities, and social structures, which often make it difficult to find common ground on leadership matters. For example, Kenya, a regional economic powerhouse, has historically played a dominant role in shaping the EAC's direction, which has sometimes led to feelings of marginalization among smaller countries. This has contributed to a leadership style that some perceive as overly influenced by the priorities of larger member states, undermining the sense of equality within the EAC (Mwangi, 2022).

The internal leadership challenges have prompted some calls for reform within the EAC. Proponents of reform argue for a more inclusive decision-making process that takes into account the interests of all member states, regardless of their size or economic power. This includes the idea of decentralizing authority within the EAC's governing bodies to ensure that all member states have an equal say in regional decisions. Such reforms could potentially help resolve conflicts over leadership and enable the EAC to act more cohesively on key issues. However, these proposals face resistance from those who benefit from the current leadership structure, making it difficult to achieve consensus on necessary reforms (Oduor, 2021).

Despite these leadership challenges, the EAC has made some progress in addressing these issues. The organization has taken steps to improve transparency in its decision-making processes and to create more opportunities for member states to contribute to major regional decisions. For example, the establishment of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) has allowed for greater representation of national interests in the legislative process, providing a platform for member states to voice their concerns. Additionally, the EAC's efforts to mediate conflicts and enhance political stability in the region have been positively received by some member states. However, the leadership disagreements continue to hinder the full realization of the EAC's potential, and it remains to be seen how the community will navigate these challenges in the future (East African Community, 2023).

Case of Each Independent country

Burundi

Burundi, a small landlocked country in East Africa, has a population of approximately 13 million people as of 2023 (World Bank, 2023). The country's population growth rate stands at around 3.2%, driven by high fertility rates, though the growth rate is expected to moderate in the coming decades (United Nations, 2022). The population remains largely rural, with a significant portion involved in subsistence agriculture. Despite the relatively small population size, the country's demographic trends pose both opportunities and challenges for its economic and social development, particularly in terms of providing adequate infrastructure and social services.

Burundi's economic indicators show modest progress, with its GDP per capita (PIB per habitant) estimated at $324 in 2022 (World Bank, 2023). This figure places the country among the poorest in the world, and it reflects the nation's heavy reliance on agriculture, which accounts for a substantial portion of its GDP. The country's economy remains fragile, influenced by political instability, limited industrialization, and infrastructural deficits. Life expectancy in Burundi stands at approximately 61 years, a significant improvement from previous decades, though it remains below the regional average for sub-Saharan Africa (World Health Organization, 2022). Despite this progress, healthcare and nutrition challenges continue to affect the population, contributing to relatively high rates of infant mortality and preventable diseases.

The literacy rate in Burundi is around 80%, with considerable variation between urban and rural areas, where access to education remains limited (UNICEF, 2023). The government has made efforts to improve access to education, but challenges such as inadequate resources, infrastructure, and political instability have hindered significant advancements. Inflation in Burundi has been a persistent issue, with rates fluctuating around 10% in recent years, primarily due to price increases in food and fuel (International Monetary Fund, 2023). Inflationary pressures continue to erode the purchasing power of households, particularly in rural areas where most people live on low incomes.

Burundi's Human Development Index (HDI) ranks it among the lowest globally, with a score of 0.430 in 2022 (UNDP, 2023), reflecting the country's ongoing challenges in health, education, and income. The nation has made limited progress in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), with inflows remaining low due to political instability, a poor business environment, and limited infrastructure (UNCTAD, 2022). Burundi's Balance of Payments has faced persistent deficits, driven by the country's reliance on imports and the limited export base. The major exports include coffee, tea, and mineral ores, which are the primary sources of foreign exchange (World Trade Organization, 2022). However, these exports face challenges such as price volatility in international markets and the effects of climate change on agricultural production.

The last presidential change in Burundi occurred in 2020, following the death of President Pierre Nkurunziza, who had been in power since 2005. His successor, Evariste Ndayishimiye, won the presidential elections and has worked to stabilize the political situation in the country (BBC, 2020). Under Ndayishimiye's leadership, Burundi has seen efforts to improve governance and economic reforms. The country’s GDP growth rate has remained relatively low in recent years, averaging around 1.7% in 2021, which is insufficient to significantly raise living standards or address widespread poverty (World Bank, 2023). However, there are some signs of recovery in the economy, bolstered by reforms and international support, though Burundi still faces substantial hurdles to sustainable economic growth and development.

Burundi has experienced one of the most prolonged and intense conflicts in the EAC region. The 1993-2005 civil war between the Tutsi-led government and the Hutu rebel groups resulted in the loss of an estimated 300,000 lives and widespread displacement. The 2015 political crisis, triggered by President Pierre Nkurunziza’s decision to run for a third term, exacerbated existing ethnic tensions and led to violent protests, government crackdowns, and widespread human rights abuses. Despite the ceasefire in 2005, Burundi continues to face challenges related to political stability, with a heavy-handed government response to opposition, making it one of the most volatile countries in the region.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is located in Central Africa and is the fourth most populous country on the continent, with an estimated population of approximately 95 million in 2023 (World Bank, 2023). The country has a youthful population, with a significant proportion under the age of 25. The DRC's population growth rate is among the highest globally, at about 3.2% per year, which presents both opportunities and challenges for the country's socio-economic development (United Nations, 2022). This rapid population growth puts pressure on the country's infrastructure, healthcare system, and employment opportunities, requiring substantial investments in human capital and social services to ensure sustainable development.

In terms of economic performance, the DRC's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita remains relatively low, at around USD 561 in 2023, reflecting its status as one of the poorest countries in the world (World Bank, 2023). This economic indicator highlights the disparities in income levels, with a large portion of the population living below the poverty line. Despite these challenges, the country has shown moderate improvements in GDP growth in recent years, with an annual growth rate of approximately 5.2% in 2023, driven primarily by the mining sector, which contributes significantly to national output (African Development Bank, 2023). However, the DRC’s economic growth is often volatile due to political instability and fluctuations in global commodity prices.

Life expectancy in the DRC is estimated at around 60 years, which is lower than the global average due to factors such as limited access to healthcare, malnutrition, and ongoing conflicts (World Health Organization, 2023). The literacy rate stands at about 77% for the general population, with urban areas showing higher rates compared to rural regions. Education remains a key challenge, particularly in rural areas where infrastructure is inadequate and access to quality schooling is limited (UNESCO, 2023). The country also faces significant inflationary pressures, with inflation reaching approximately 15% in 2023, mainly due to exchange rate fluctuations, the devaluation of the Congolese Franc, and rising food prices (Central Bank of Congo, 2023).

The DRC’s Human Development Index (HDI) remains low, ranking 179th out of 189 countries in 2023 (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). This reflects significant challenges in health, education, and income, all of which are critical components of the HDI. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the DRC remains below expectations, with FDI inflows of about USD 1.4 billion in 2023, a modest figure compared to its regional peers (World Bank, 2023). The country’s balance of payments remains volatile, often characterized by a large trade deficit, with major imports including fuel, machinery, and foodstuffs. The main exports of the DRC are minerals such as cobalt, copper, and diamonds, which make up the bulk of its export revenues, particularly to China and other emerging markets (African Development Bank, 2023).

The most recent presidential change in the DRC occurred in 2019, when Félix Tshisekedi assumed office after a contentious election, marking the first peaceful transfer of power in the country’s history. Tshisekedi's presidency has focused on tackling corruption, improving security, and attracting foreign investment to stimulate economic growth (BBC News, 2019). Despite political instability and occasional flare-ups of violence, there have been efforts to stabilize governance and promote economic reforms. Overall, while the DRC continues to face significant development challenges, its mineral wealth and efforts toward political reform offer potential for future growth, provided the country can overcome internal conflicts and improve governance.

Kenya

Kenya is a dynamic and rapidly growing country located in East Africa. As of 2024, the country’s population stands at approximately 55 million people, with an annual growth rate of about 2.3% (World Bank, 2024). This growth rate is among the highest in the region, reflecting the country’s high birth rate and improvements in healthcare that have led to longer life expectancies. The population is characterized by a youthful demographic, with a significant proportion under the age of 30. These factors present both challenges and opportunities for economic development, especially in areas such as education, healthcare, and employment.

Kenya’s GDP per capita, which is a measure of the average economic output per person, was estimated at $2,100 in 2023 (World Bank, 2024). While this figure reflects moderate economic development, it still underscores the need for more robust economic growth to improve living standards across the country. The nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate has been relatively strong, averaging around 5.5% over the last few years, driven by sectors such as agriculture, services, and infrastructure (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2024). However, inflation remains a concern, with the rate hovering around 7% as of 2024, driven by fluctuating food and energy prices (Kenya National Treasury, 2024). This has affected purchasing power and economic stability, especially for low-income households.

Life expectancy in Kenya has been steadily improving, currently averaging 67 years, with women living slightly longer than men (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). The country has made notable progress in combating diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, although challenges remain, particularly in rural areas where access to healthcare services can be limited. Literacy rates are high, with the adult literacy rate reaching about 81% as of 2023, a testament to the country’s investment in education (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023). This is essential for fostering human capital, particularly in a rapidly evolving labor market. Despite these achievements, Kenya faces persistent challenges in reducing poverty, improving public health, and ensuring equitable access to education and employment opportunities.

Kenya’s development index, as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI), places it in the medium human development category. The latest HDI report ranks Kenya 143rd globally, reflecting ongoing challenges in addressing poverty and inequality (UNDP, 2023). The country has seen a steady rise in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), with inflows reaching approximately $1.6 billion in 2023, driven by sectors such as agriculture, telecommunications, and infrastructure development (Kenya Investment Authority, 2024). However, Kenya’s Balance of Payments has been under pressure due to rising import costs, particularly for oil and capital goods. As a result, the country has experienced trade deficits, though the service sector, especially tourism and finance, has been a significant contributor to export revenues.

Kenya's major exports include tea, coffee, horticultural products, and petroleum products. The agricultural sector, particularly tea and flowers, remains a cornerstone of the economy, with tea being one of the top export commodities, primarily to markets in the United States, the UK, and the Middle East (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). In terms of political leadership, Kenya underwent a significant change in presidency in 2022, with President William Ruto succeeding Uhuru Kenyatta after a competitive election process. The political transition was largely peaceful, demonstrating the country's evolving democratic processes. Looking ahead, Kenya's economic growth is expected to continue, with projected GDP growth of 6.2% in 2024, as the government focuses on infrastructure, digital economy, and manufacturing sectors to diversify the economy and create more jobs for its growing population (World Bank, 2024).

In Kenya, post-election violence in 2007-2008 was one of the most significant conflicts in the country's history, resulting in the loss of over 1,000 lives and displacement of hundreds of thousands. The violence was primarily fueled by political competition between different ethnic groups, with the Kikuyu and Luo communities being at the forefront of the violence. This incident highlighted the fragile nature of Kenya's political landscape, where ethnic divisions often influence electoral outcomes and lead to violence when political power is contested. Though the establishment of a coalition government in 2008 and the subsequent reforms helped restore peace, political tensions remain prevalent in Kenya.

Rwanda

Rwanda, a small landlocked country in East Africa, has experienced significant economic and social changes in recent years. As of 2024, Rwanda's population is estimated at approximately 13.3 million, with a steady population growth rate of around 2.5% per year (World Bank, 2023). This growth is attributed to both high fertility rates and improving healthcare systems, which have reduced mortality rates, especially among children. Despite Rwanda's small geographical size, its population density is high, which places significant pressure on the country's infrastructure and resources. However, the government has implemented policies aimed at controlling population growth through family planning initiatives.

In terms of economic indicators, Rwanda's GDP per capita (PIB per habitant) has shown consistent growth in recent years, reaching approximately $1,200 in 2023 (IMF, 2023). This is a notable increase from earlier years, reflecting the country's strong economic performance and development efforts. The country's economy has been diversified in recent decades, with agriculture, services, and industry all contributing to GDP growth. Furthermore, life expectancy in Rwanda has significantly improved, with the average life expectancy at birth rising to about 70 years in 2023, a substantial increase from 48 years in 2000 (World Bank, 2023). This improvement is largely due to advancements in healthcare services, particularly in maternal and child health, and the expansion of health insurance coverage.

Rwanda has also made significant progress in education, with a literacy rate of around 73% for the total population and an even higher rate among youth (UNESCO, 2023). The government has invested heavily in educational reforms, including primary and secondary education, which have yielded positive results. In terms of inflation, Rwanda has experienced relatively low and stable inflation rates, averaging around 5.3% in 2023 (IMF, 2023). This stability has been crucial in maintaining economic growth and ensuring that the cost of living does not rise sharply, thereby benefiting both businesses and households.

Rwanda's development index, measured by the Human Development Index (HDI), has steadily improved, with the country being ranked 158th out of 189 countries in the 2023 report (UNDP, 2023). This improvement reflects progress in education, healthcare, and economic growth. Additionally, foreign direct investment (FDI) has increased in recent years, with FDI inflows reaching approximately $500 million in 2022 (World Bank, 2023). These investments are primarily in infrastructure, energy, and services, signaling confidence in

Rwanda’s stable political environment and growing economy. Rwanda's balance of payments has been relatively stable, although it continues to face challenges related to its trade balance, with imports outweighing exports, particularly in machinery and fuel.

Rwanda's main exports include coffee, tea, and minerals, particularly tungsten, tin, and tantalum, which are crucial to the country's export revenues (EAC, 2023). These commodities, especially coffee and tea, have been Rwanda's traditional exports, while mining exports have seen increased demand in global markets. The last change in the presidency occurred in 2021, when President Paul Kagame was re-elected for a fourth term following his victory in the presidential elections (BBC News, 2021). Under Kagame’s leadership, Rwanda has experienced robust economic growth, with the country's GDP growing at an average annual rate of 7-8% over the last decade (IMF, 2023). This growth has been driven by key reforms and investments aimed at modernizing Rwanda's infrastructure and boosting the private sector.

Rwanda, a relatively stable country compared to some of its neighbors, has experienced tensions with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) due to the presence of rebel groups in eastern Congo. Rwanda has accused the DRC of harboring the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a group made up of individuals responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi. The situation has led to periodic military confrontations and a deepening mistrust between the two nations, further destabilizing the region.

South Sudan

South Sudan, located in East-Central Africa, has an estimated population of approximately 11.7 million people as of 2023, making it one of the youngest and least populous countries in Africa (World Bank, 2023). The country has experienced significant population growth, driven by both natural population increase and return migration, particularly following the end of its civil war in 2013 and the eventual peace agreement in 2018. The population growth rate stands at around 2.5% annually, reflecting a relatively youthful population with a large proportion under the age of 25 (United Nations Population Division, 2023). However, South Sudan's population dynamics are influenced by the volatile political climate, conflict, and displacement, which have significantly impacted demographic patterns over the past decade.

In terms of economic indicators, South Sudan’s GDP per capita remains low, with estimates of around USD 320 in 2022, reflecting its ongoing challenges with economic development and the impact of civil unrest (World Bank, 2022). The country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is largely driven by the oil sector, which accounts for over 40% of GDP and more than 90% of export revenues (African Development Bank, 2021). Life expectancy in South Sudan is significantly lower compared to global averages, standing at about 57 years, reflecting challenges in healthcare infrastructure, malnutrition, and the prolonged effects of conflict (World Health Organization, 2022). This indicator underscores the country’s struggle to provide basic services and the harsh living conditions faced by much of its population.

The literacy rate in South Sudan is estimated at approximately 34%, one of the lowest in Africa, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas. Limited access to education, especially in conflict zones, and the underdeveloped infrastructure have contributed to these low literacy levels (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022). South Sudan also faces high inflation rates, primarily due to the fluctuating oil prices and economic instability, which have led to a rapid depreciation of its currency. In 2021, the inflation rate stood at around 36%, exacerbating poverty and undermining economic stability (Central Bank of South Sudan, 2021). These economic challenges reflect the country’s dependency on oil revenues and its vulnerability to external shocks.

The Human Development Index (HDI) of South Sudan is one of the lowest in the world, ranking 186th out of 189 countries in the 2020 UNDP report (UNDP, 2020). This reflects the country’s challenges in health, education, and income. Despite efforts to stabilize the economy, foreign direct investment (FDI) has been limited, mainly due to the volatile political environment and instability. However, in recent years, the government has made efforts to attract FDI by offering incentives to international companies, particularly in the oil and mining sectors (World Bank, 2022). The Balance of Payments remains heavily dependent on oil exports, with the country facing a large trade deficit due to low diversification in its export base and reliance on imported goods (International Monetary Fund, 2022).

South Sudan's main exports include crude oil, which dominates the export sector, alongside some agricultural products like sorghum and sesame. The country has made efforts to diversify its exports, but the oil sector continues to dominate its external trade (African Development Bank, 2021). The last presidential change occurred in 2021, following the peace agreement and the formation of a transitional government, which saw President Salva Kiir retain power. This peaceful transition marked a hopeful shift for stability after years of civil war. In terms of economic growth, the country's GDP growth has been volatile, with growth of approximately 3.2% in 2021, reflecting post-conflict recovery efforts and the stabilization of oil production (World Bank, 2022). However, the economic outlook remains uncertain due to ongoing security risks, challenges in governance, and the dependency on the oil sector.

South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, has been embroiled in civil war since it gained independence from Sudan in 2011. The conflict, initially triggered by a power struggle between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy, Riek Machar, has been compounded by ethnic divisions, particularly between the Dinka and Nuer tribes. The war has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions of people. Despite the signing of a peace agreement in 2018, South Sudan remains deeply divided, with the conflict continuing to affect both national unity and regional peace. The challenge of reconciling political and ethnic groups, along with rebuilding the country's infrastructure, continues to hinder progress.

Somalia

Somalia is a country located in the Horn of Africa, with a population estimated at approximately 17 million people as of 2023 (World Bank, 2023). The population has experienced significant growth over recent years, with a current annual population growth rate of around 2.9%, reflecting high fertility rates despite the ongoing challenges faced by the nation (United Nations, 2022). The young population structure, with over 60% under the age of 25, contributes to this rapid demographic expansion. However, Somalia still faces challenges related to high levels of poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to quality healthcare and education, which further complicate the nation's development trajectory (World Bank, 2023).

Somalia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita remains low, standing at approximately $350 in 2022 (IMF, 2023). This figure is indicative of the economic struggles faced by the nation, largely due to prolonged periods of conflict, political instability, and the lack of a robust infrastructure. Despite these challenges, the country has shown some resilience in sectors such as agriculture, telecommunications, and services. Life expectancy in Somalia is approximately 58 years, reflecting both the positive strides in health services and the ongoing challenges posed by conflict and environmental factors (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). The literacy rate is low, with estimates suggesting that around 37% of the population over the age of 15 can read and write, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas (UNESCO, 2021).

Inflation in Somalia has fluctuated considerably in recent years, with the inflation rate reaching approximately 4.5% in 2023, mainly driven by food price volatility, currency instability, and the impact of droughts on agricultural production (Central Bank of Somalia, 2023). Somalia's Human Development Index (HDI), a composite measure of life expectancy, education, and per capita income, ranks low globally, standing at 0.285 in 2022, which places it among the least developed countries in the world (UNDP, 2023). Despite this, efforts have been made to improve infrastructure and human capital development, which are essential for the country's long-term growth and development prospects.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Somalia remains relatively low but has shown some improvement in recent years, particularly in sectors such as telecommunications, construction, and energy. In 2022, FDI inflows were estimated at $100 million, a modest increase from previous years (UNCTAD, 2023). The country's Balance of Payments (BoP) has been characterized by a chronic current account deficit, primarily due to imports exceeding exports. Somalia's main exports include livestock, bananas, fish, and charcoal, with the livestock sector being the most significant contributor to foreign exchange earnings (FAO, 2022). The country also faces a heavy reliance on remittances from the Somali diaspora, which constitute a substantial portion of its GDP.

In terms of political transitions, Somalia has experienced considerable volatility. The most recent presidential election took place in May 2022, marking a transition from President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, who served from 2017 to 2022, to President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, a former president who was re-elected for a second term (BBC, 2022). The change in leadership was peaceful, although the electoral process was marred by delays and security challenges. Regarding economic growth, Somalia's GDP growth has been volatile, with an estimated growth rate of 3.5% in 2022, driven by the recovery of agricultural production and improvements in security and governance in certain regions (World Bank, 2023). However, the ongoing challenges of conflict and climate change remain significant barriers to sustained growth.

Tanzania

Tanzania, located in East Africa, has an estimated population of around 67.6 million people in 2024, with a consistent population growth rate of approximately 3.0% annually. This rapid population growth is driven by high birth rates and improving healthcare systems, which have contributed to longer life expectancies (World Bank, 2023). With such growth, Tanzania faces both opportunities and challenges in managing resources, urbanization, and service delivery. The population growth continues to place pressure on social services, infrastructure, and the job market, all of which are critical to sustaining development.

Tanzania's GDP per capita, a key measure of economic performance, stands at around $1,150 USD in 2023, reflecting the country’s progress in diversifying its economy, although it remains one of the lower-income economies in the world (IMF, 2024). Despite this, the nation has been making significant strides in infrastructure development, particularly in energy and transportation, which have supported its economic growth. However, the growth of GDP has not been uniformly felt across all sectors, as agricultural productivity still lags behind the potential growth of other sectors such as services and industry. Inflation rates in Tanzania, though relatively stable, have shown fluctuations, with the latest figures indicating a rate of 3.8% in 2023 (World Bank, 2023).

Life expectancy in Tanzania has steadily improved over the past few decades due to better healthcare access and increased investments in health infrastructure. As of 2023, life expectancy is approximately 67 years (World Bank, 2023). The government's efforts to combat infectious diseases, improve maternal and child health, and enhance sanitation have been central to this improvement. Tanzania’s literacy rate stands at around 78% for individuals aged 15 and above, which highlights the progress made in education (UNESCO, 2022). However, challenges in education quality and accessibility remain, particularly in rural areas, affecting the country's ability to fully capitalize on its human resources for development.

In terms of development, Tanzania is ranked 164th on the Human Development Index (HDI) as of 2023 (UNDP, 2023), which is considered a medium level of human development. The country continues to make incremental progress toward improving health, education, and income, yet it still faces significant poverty levels, particularly in rural regions. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been a critical driver of Tanzania’s development, particularly in mining, agriculture, and infrastructure, with the country attracting about $1.5 billion in FDI in 2022 (UNCTAD, 2023). However, the balance of payments remains a concern due to Tanzania’s reliance on imports and the challenge of generating sufficient export revenues to match its growing import needs.

Tanzania's main exports include gold, coffee, and tobacco, with gold being the dominant export commodity. In 2023, Tanzania's export earnings from gold were estimated at $2.2 billion, constituting about 25% of its total export revenue (Bank of Tanzania, 2023). The last presidential change occurred in March 2021 when Samia Suluhu Hassan succeeded John Magufuli after his death. Her leadership has been marked by a shift toward more diplomatic relations and a focus on economic reforms to attract further foreign investment and enhance Tanzania's international standing (Reuters, 2021). The country's GDP growth rate has shown resilience, reaching 5.2% in 2023 despite global economic challenges (IMF, 2024). This steady growth reflects the government's continued efforts to promote economic diversification, industrialization, and infrastructure development.

Tanzania, while relatively stable compared to its neighbors, has faced its own challenges, particularly with the issue of political opposition and ethnic tensions. The Zanzibar archipelago, in particular, has witnessed political violence and electoral disputes. Zanzibar's political landscape has been historically divided along ethnic lines, with the opposition party, Civic United Front (CUF), accusing the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party of electoral fraud. Tensions have sometimes resulted in violence, particularly after contested elections, despite Tanzania's reputation as a peaceful nation in the region.

Uganda

Uganda, located in East Africa, has a rapidly growing population, with the most recent estimate placing it at approximately 47.1 million people in 2023 (World Bank, 2023). The country has one of the youngest populations in the world, with a median age of around 16 years (United Nations, 2022). This demographic trend, combined with a high fertility rate of 5.4 children per woman, contributes to a population growth rate of about 3.2% annually, one of the highest in Africa (World Bank, 2023). This rapid population growth poses both opportunities and challenges for Uganda, particularly in terms of providing services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

In terms of economic performance, Uganda's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), was estimated at $2,515 in 2023 (World Bank, 2023). Despite substantial growth in recent years, the country remains one of the poorest in the region. However, Uganda's economy has been expanding steadily, with an average GDP growth rate of 6.3% in the past decade (African Development Bank, 2021). This growth is largely attributed to agriculture, which employs a significant portion of the workforce, alongside emerging sectors such as oil production. Life expectancy in Uganda is improving, reaching an average of 64.2 years in 2023, thanks to improvements in healthcare, but it remains lower than the global average (World Bank, 2023).

Uganda's literacy rate stands at 75.5% for individuals aged 15 and above, reflecting steady improvements in education over the years (UNICEF, 2022). However, challenges remain in ensuring quality education, especially in rural areas, and the country continues to work toward improving both access to and the quality of education. The country's inflation rate, which fluctuates due to external and internal pressures, was recorded at 7.3% in 2023, up from 4.5% in 2022, primarily driven by food prices and global economic conditions (Bank of Uganda, 2023). Despite these inflationary pressures, Uganda is committed to maintaining economic stability, with measures in place to control inflation and reduce fiscal deficits.

The Human Development Index (HDI) for Uganda in 2021 was 0.528, positioning it in the medium development category. This reflects the country's progress in key development indicators such as education, life expectancy, and income levels (UNDP, 2021). Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into Uganda have increased significantly, with FDI reaching $1.3 billion in 2022, largely driven by the development of oil reserves and infrastructure projects (Uganda Investment Authority, 2023). However, the balance of payments remains a challenge, as Uganda continues to experience a trade deficit, with imports exceeding exports. Uganda's main exports include coffee, tea, and gold, with coffee being the most important export product (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

The most recent change in Uganda's presidency occurred in 2021 when President Yoweri Museveni, in power since 1986, was re-elected for a sixth term after a controversial election (BBC News, 2021). Museveni's presidency has been marked by political stability but also criticism regarding democratic practices and human rights issues. Despite this, the country's GDP has shown resilience and continued growth. In 2023, Uganda's economy grew by 6.5%, driven by sectors such as construction, services, and agriculture (World Bank, 2023). While challenges remain in governance and economic equality, Uganda's growth trajectory is promising, and the government is actively working to address the structural issues hindering further progress.

In Uganda, conflicts have been largely driven by ethnic and political struggles. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group led by Joseph Kony, was responsible for decades of violence, abductions, and displacement in northern Uganda. The insurgency, which lasted for over 20 years, resulted in significant loss of life and widespread suffering among civilians. While the LRA was weakened in the 2000s, the effects of the conflict continue to be felt in northern Uganda. Additionally, political power struggles between the ruling party, led by President Yoweri Museveni, and opposition groups have led to tensions, with accusations of electoral manipulation and suppression of dissent.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the East African Community (EAC) has made significant efforts to strengthen regional political cooperation and security, with initiatives such as the East African Standby Force (EASF) and regular summits aimed at fostering dialogue among member states. While these efforts have contributed to regional peacebuilding, challenges such as political instability, divergent governance systems, and the threat of non-state actors continue to undermine the full potential of the EAC's security framework. Member states, each with unique political dynamics, must overcome these challenges to create a more cohesive and effective regional security architecture.

Despite the obstacles, the EAC's commitment to regional integration remains strong. The organization has made remarkable strides in promoting good governance and democratic practices, which are essential for long-term political stability and the prevention of conflict. The focus on governance reform, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution through multilateral engagement offers a path forward for a more stable and unified East Africa. However, the EAC must continue to address the capacity gaps within its security framework and ensure that its peacekeeping initiatives, particularly the EASF, are better equipped and funded to handle emerging threats.

Ultimately, the future of the EAC's political cooperation and security depends on the political will and commitment of its member states. Greater collaboration, resource mobilization, and strengthening of institutions will be necessary to mitigate the challenges of regional conflict and enhance the EAC's role in fostering stability and prosperity. With continued efforts toward integration and cooperation, the EAC has the potential to achieve a more secure, stable, and democratic region, setting an example for other African communities seeking to overcome similar challenges.

The East African Community (EAC) should prioritize strengthening political will and commitment among its member states to enhance the effectiveness of regional cooperation in security matters. One key recommendation is to foster deeper collaboration and mutual trust among political leaders to overcome divergences in governance structures. This could be achieved by organizing more frequent high-level political dialogues focused on conflict prevention, shared security challenges, and regional integration. Through consistent engagement, leaders can ensure that their countries remain committed to the EAC's overarching goals of stability, security, and democratic governance. Additionally, the EAC should encourage a unified stance on governance reforms, including the promotion of transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, to address political instability within the region (Bashir, 2018).

Another critical recommendation is to increase investment in the East African Standby Force (EASF) and ensure its operational readiness to handle complex peacekeeping missions. The EAC should work toward securing adequate financial resources and logistical support from member states and external partners to enhance the capacity of the EASF. This could involve facilitating joint training exercises, improving the force's command-and-control capabilities, and ensuring that member states are fully prepared to deploy troops rapidly in response to crises. Strengthening the EASF's mandate and operational framework will ensure that it is not only a peacekeeping tool but also a proactive force capable of preventing and responding to security threats across the region (EAC, 2020).

Finally, the EAC should prioritize addressing the security challenges posed by non-state actors, such as armed groups and terrorist organizations, by enhancing intelligence sharing and cross-border security cooperation. Strengthening coordination between member states' security agencies and promoting information-sharing platforms can help mitigate transnational threats like terrorism and insurgencies. Additionally, the EAC could explore partnerships with international actors, such as the United Nations and the African Union, to bolster its security operations. Through collaborative efforts and shared responsibility, the EAC can effectively tackle the complex security landscape and ensure that the region remains peaceful and stable, providing a conducive environment for political cooperation and economic integration (African Union, 2020).

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