

# Africa Needs More than Just the Silencing of Guns

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Africa Out of Bullets, courtesy of Control Arms /flickr

Over the past five decades, Africa has experienced significant change and positive transition. However, violent conflict continues to compromise prospects for sustained human development and economic progress. As part of its 50th Anniversary Declaration in May 2013, the African Union (AU) set itself the goal of [ending all wars in Africa by 2020](#) and is now working on a roadmap towards a conflict-free continent (‘[silencing guns in Africa](#)’, as the slogan goes).

Is this goal in fact attainable? Ending wars is imperative, as violent conflict is the biggest impediment to a more prosperous Africa. But what would the concrete benefits look like over time; and would the absence of war by 2020 really boost Africa’s economic and human development and yield immediate dividends? By generating

momentum for this kind of discussion in the context of the [post-2015 development agenda](#), the AU's aggressive target is noteworthy.

Beyond the laudable aspiration, however, both the target and the timeframe will prove exceptionally challenging. Using the [International Futures \(IFs\) model](#), an integrated global forecasting system, some interesting insights and scenarios emerge. The model reveals that even if Africa successfully eliminates large-scale inter- and intrastate wars by 2020 – and this remains a huge if – it may not prove to be the panacea that many expect. Ending war is a necessary but insufficient condition to increase prosperity, and development is itself a lengthy, messy and potentially even disruptive process.

If Africa becomes free of wars by 2020, its gross domestic product (GDP) would have increased by a cumulative US\$780,2 billion in 2030 (based on constant 2005 US dollars at market exchange rate). This is like adding the current Nigerian and the Egyptian economies. By 2030, an African economy boosted by a 'no war dividend' would be worth US\$34,8 trillion, which is 4% more than under the expected current trajectory. By 2045, the 'no war dividend' could see Africa's economy grow to be 10% larger than it would have been without it.

Nevertheless, while economic growth is necessary, it does not automatically lead to increased prosperity for most people – not to mention shared prosperity. Changes in patterns of income (and wealth) tend to occur at a very slow pace, and in some cases growth worsened inequality. Similarly, the potential human development gains from the eradication of war by 2020 in terms of income, health and education are not spectacular.

Life expectancy for Africans would hardly increase, and education would improve only marginally, for example. In short, Africa will need to do much better – or, as the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, famously put it, '[Africa must run while others walk](#)'.

Changes in income distribution and improving education, health and other public goods ultimately requires greater government capacity. Under the IFs scenario, improved governance will be a game changer. Ending war by 2020 would lift almost 60 million Africans out of

poverty by 2045, and reduce the percentage of people living on less than US\$1,25 a day from roughly 17% to about 14,5%. That would still leave some 300 million Africans living in poverty in 2045. If, in addition to the absence of war, governance can be improved (that is, if all African countries converged to the average level of the top 10 performing countries in terms of government effectiveness by 2030), an additional 40 million people could escape poverty.

That would bring down the percentage of Africans living on less than US\$1,25 a day to 12,6%, which is roughly where South Africa is today. Similarly, by 2030 the combined effect of ending war and improving governance would boost access to electricity to 67% – compared to 57% under the expected current trajectory – while ending wars on its own would produce only marginal gains. Good governance also supports the resolution of social conflict, contributing further to development opportunities.

The greatest threat to the AU's aspiration of eradicating war is that policy objectives and targets are unlikely to be reached without an adequate understanding of the current situation (that is, the baseline), its underlying dynamics and likely future trends. Without that, sensible planning, monitoring and evaluation become impossible.

An earlier paper by the Institute for Security Studies on the [future of intrastate conflict in Africa](#), which analysed trends and patterns of conflict and instability in Africa since the end of the Cold War, concluded that violence and the associated risk of instability are likely to persist despite a steady decline in large-scale violence and interstate wars. This is due to the changing nature of armed conflict in Africa and global dynamics.

The spread of transnational organised crime, including terrorism, for example, is sometimes intertwined with political violence and local criminal dynamics. Contemporary African conflicts are also increasingly fragmented, fought on a smaller scale and occurring on the peripheries of states, with more non-state actors involved. Examples include Darfur in Sudan, the Central African Republic and northern Mali and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Data from the [Heidelberg Conflict Barometer](#) even suggests that there has been no clear overall decline in intrastate violence in Africa. In fact, ending war may not be the biggest challenge. Lower intensity conflict is becoming more prevalent and there has been a rise in social conflict, especially anti-government violence, since 2011, combined with a rise in the level of protests and riots. Elections-related violence has also increased across Africa, even as the push for democratisation and multi-party elections has brought about significant improvement in accountability.

While higher levels of democracy are generally associated with greater peace in the longer term, democratisation can also be a ‘shock’ for societies and could potentially trigger violence in the short and medium term, as the violent denouement of elections in Kenya in 2007, and the Ivory Coast in 2010 demonstrate.

Partial democracies with factionalism appear to be an exceptionally unstable type of regime. Violence at community level due to competition over scarce livelihood resources such as land and water also seems to be on the rise. Other conflict drivers include rapid population growth and urbanisation, social imbalances and exclusion, poor governance and the location of some newly discovered natural resources along disputed borders, such as between Tanzania and Malawi.

Given the enormity of the task involved in addressing each of these conflict risk factors, improved understanding of the dynamics of Africa’s current conflicts should be prioritised, as this would directly help with setting aggressive yet more realistic targets.

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