

TANA FORUM TEN-YEAR REVIEW REPORT



**TANA
FORUM**

FRANK, RELEVANT, AND CANDID DIALOGUE.

A Decade of Frank Dialogue: Evaluating the Impact and
Future of the Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa

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Finally, we would like to convey our sincere gratitude to the Tana Forum Secretariat staff, who have been organizing the Forum with professionalism and a familial atmosphere. Collectively, your collaboration and involvement have been essential to the success of this initiative.

Thank you!

Tana Forum Secretariat

Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS)

Executive Summary

The Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa was launched in 2012 as a bold experiment in African-led dialogue on peace and security. Conceived in the spirit of the 2009 Tripoli Declaration's call for African-led and African-owned solutions to the continent's peace and security challenges, the Forum promised an informal, independent, and politically safe space where Heads of State, policymakers, academics, civil society, and private sector leaders could engage frankly and on equal footing to explore African-led security solutions.

This review assesses the Forum's impact, shortcomings, and relevance to contemporary challenges, and identifies strategic directions for the future. It draws on extensive desk research, a stakeholder and staff survey, targeted outreach to key senior figures, and interviews with founding architects, Board members, the current Secretariat staff, and long-standing contributors.

Key Findings

Foundational Relevance

The founding philosophy of the Tana Forum — to serve as a platform for candid, African-led dialogue on peace and security — remains highly relevant, particularly as the continent confronts evolving security threats and geopolitical complexities. The Forum has maintained thematic relevance through deliberate alignment with the African Union's annual themes, and by discussing emerging peace and security issues such as violent extremism, digital security, and youth engagement.

Influence on Discourse, Narrative, and Policy

The review found that Tana has influenced discourse by placing critical themes on the agenda and elevating African perspectives in international conversations. In some cases, this has indirectly informed AU frameworks or regional initiatives. The Forum's direct influence on policy remains largely informal and advisory; however, its contribution to thought leadership, thematic prioritisation, and the framing of African solutions is widely acknowledged. Its influence lies in shaping critical reflection, priority-setting, and discourse. It has acted as a policy incubator, where issues are framed, contested, and socialised — paving the way for more formal adoption down the line. As one respondent put it: "It is a platform that shapes minds, not mandates — but minds shape mandates."

Knowledge Products and Pre/Post-Forum Activities

Stakeholder feedback highlights that Tana Forum knowledge products are broadly appreciated and seen as valuable contributions to peace and security discourse in Africa. The State of Peace and Security in Africa (SPSA) Report is recognised as the strongest performer among Tana’s outputs, providing a credible and well-regarded overview of continental security trends.

Pre- and post-Forum activities — ranging from expert meetings and public lectures to side events and thematic dialogues — are widely regarded as instrumental in advancing the Forum’s objectives. Sixty percent of respondents rated their contribution as significant or very significant, with the SPSA Report consistently cited for its analytical depth and policy relevance.

Successes

The Tana Forum has achieved notable successes in advancing its mission. Beyond serving as an annual gathering, it has shaped discourse, strengthened networks, and positioned itself as a unique African-led space for dialogue on peace and security. Four areas of impact were consistently underscored:

- Elevating African scholarship and voices — Tana has emerged as a trusted convening space for African voices. Its informal setting has allowed for candid exchanges rarely possible in formal AU meetings. Its non-politicised approach and independence from government control promote open and frank dialogue.
- Continental visibility — Tana has secured recognition as a fixture on the AU calendar and a respected reference point for African security discourse.
- A catalyst for networking, informal diplomacy, and collaboration — It has facilitated networking and informal diplomacy among CSOs, African think tanks, and policymakers by enabling connections and collaborations not easily replicated in formal diplomatic settings.
- Promoting awareness and influencing agendas — Its thematic focus has often anticipated emerging issues, from governance and constitutionalism to climate-related security risks. The Forum has raised awareness, strengthened political commitment, and influenced agenda-setting across Africa’s peace and security landscape.

However, these achievements are tempered by challenges that cut across

institutional design, operations and the broader political environment. These challenges not only complicate implementation but also shape the Forum’s long-term relevance and sustainability.

Institutional, Structural, and Political Challenges

- The review identifies several core constraints affecting the Tana Forum’s ability to fully deliver on its mandate. These include:
- Institutional fragility — The Forum remains administratively embedded within the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) at Addis Ababa University, without the legal, financial, or operational independence envisioned by its founders. The aspiration to institutionalise Tana as a standalone foundation — proposed since inception — has yet to be realised and is widely regarded as a missed opportunity.
- Institutional capacity gaps — Reliance on short-term support staff or temporary staffing undermines continuity and year-round coordination.
- Funding instability — Dependence on a narrow pool of external donors limits planning, scale, and independence, while political shifts in donor countries exacerbate uncertainty.
- Security risks — Instability in the region where the forum is held poses both logistical and participation challenges.
- Limited private sector engagement — Minimal involvement from business actors constrains thematic breadth and potential for diversified funding.
- Limited follow-up and impact measurement — Lack of a robust mechanisms to track uptake of recommendations or measure influence impedes sustained policy impact.

These challenges collectively reduce the Forum’s operational agility, financial sustainability, and policy influence — despite its unique positioning as a premier platform for African peace and security dialogue.

Strategic Recommendations

To remain relevant and impactful in its second decade, stakeholders recommend:

- Reclaim the spirit of Tana — Restore the boldness, independence, and intellectual edge of the early years.

- Institutional transformation—Establish Tana as an independent foundation with diversified, African-led financing to reduce donor dependency.
- Geographic flexibility — Explore rotating or hybrid hosting models to make Tana truly pan-African.
- Strengthen follow-up — Improve monitoring and evaluation framework to track and support implementation of recommendations.
- Improve year-round engagement — Leverage digital infrastructure for continuous dialogue, visibility, and policy influence.

A Vision for the Next Decade

The next phase of Tana will require decisive choices. Stakeholders envision a Forum that is:

- Independent and resilient in its governance and financing;
- Inclusive and representative, drawing on the full diversity of African voices;
- Bold and agenda-setting, unafraid to tackle politically sensitive issues;
- Impact-oriented, with clear pathways from dialogue to policy action;
- Digitally agile, reaching far beyond its annual convening.

This vision may be realised once factors that hinder its progress are addressed as indicated earlier. Without these reforms, the Forum risks a gradual erosion of its distinct role in Africa's peace and security landscape.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Objectives of the Review

Following a decade of convening high-level dialogue on peace and security in Africa, the Tana Forum Secretariat commissioned this review to reflect on the Forum's impact, assess its contributions, and identify strategic directions for the future. The review seeks to evaluate the Forum's role as a platform for dialogue, strategic thinking, and policy engagement across the continent.

The review also serves as a forward-looking exercise, intended to inform future programming and ensure the Forum's continued relevance, responsiveness, and sustainability in a rapidly changing peace and security landscape. It takes into account the Forum's main sessions as well as its pre- and post-event activities, with a view to capturing the full spectrum of its contributions.

1.2 Specific Objectives

The review was guided by the following specific objectives:

- To assess the extent to which the Tana Forum has contributed to a shift in peace and security narratives on the African continent, particularly in advancing African ownership of these conversations.
- To evaluate the Forum's impact on policy formulation and implementation at national, regional, and continental levels.
- To explore how the Forum has influenced peace and security discourse and policy processes through its annual themes, discussions, and recommendations.
- To determine how Forum participants—including those involved in pre- and post-Forum engagements—have benefited from their participation, especially in terms of knowledge, networking, and professional development.
- To assess the uptake and relevance of key recommendations and takeaways generated through Forum deliberations.
- To explore strategic directions for the future of the Forum, considering evolving peace and security dynamics on the continent.
- To propose concrete approaches for ensuring the long-term sustainability and institutional strengthening of the Tana Forum.

1.3 Methodological Approach

This assessment employed a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research, stakeholder surveys, key informant interviews, and targeted outreach to high-level figures. In total, thirty respondents contributed to the study. The approach was designed to capture both quantitative data and in depth reflections on the Forum's relevance, influence, and evolution within the African peace and security landscape.

1.3.1 Desk Research

The assessment began with an extensive desk review of core documents generated by or associated with the Tana Forum. These included all ten official Forum reports (2012–2022), participant feedback forms from previous editions, opening and closing statements delivered by Forum leadership, and thematic background papers developed to support annual themes. This desk research helped establish a clear understanding of the Forum's historical trajectory, thematic focus areas, and strategic positioning over time.

1.3.2 Stakeholder and Staff Survey

A structured stakeholder survey was developed and disseminated using the Qualtrics platform. It was sent to individuals who have attended the Forum in various capacities—representing government institutions, regional and international organisations, civil society and academia. In addition, a staff survey was distributed to Tana Forum Secretariat staff members actively working on the Forum. The questionnaires featured both closed and open-ended questions designed to assess perceptions around the Forum's thematic relevance, influence on peace and security discourse, professional development value, inclusivity, and contributions to policy thinking and practice, challenges, achievements etc.

The feedback provided a snapshot of how the Forum is perceived by a cross-section of stakeholders with direct engagement experience.

1.3.3 Key Informant Interviews

To supplement the survey data with deeper qualitative insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who have been closely involved in the Forum's design, delivery, or governance. These interviews explored respondents' reflections on the Forum's overall value, its evolution and limitations, and strategic recommendations for its sustainability and future direction. The

interviews helped to surface institutional memory and critical reflections that were not always captured in the survey data.

1.3.4 Targeted Outreach to Senior Stakeholders

In addition to the interviews, formal letters containing tailored questions were sent to a select group of senior and high-profile figures who have played important roles in shaping or guiding the Forum over the years. The aim was to gather reflections on the Forum's legacy, strategic intent, and contribution to peace and security discourse on the continent. Although not all recipients responded, this outreach was an important part of the effort to include diverse leadership perspectives.

1.4 Stakeholder Groups Consulted

The assessment engaged a range of stakeholders who have been directly or indirectly involved in the Tana Forum over the past decade. These stakeholders were selected to reflect the diversity of actors who contribute to or are impacted by the Forum's activities, including its main event, pre-Forum dialogues, and post-Forum engagements.

In total, 58 stakeholders were contacted for this assessment, with 30 providing responses. 32 stakeholders were invited to participate in the stakeholder survey, of which 16 responded — a 50% response rate. In addition, 7 staff members completed the staff survey, 5 one-on-one interviews were held, and 2 senior figures submitted written responses to in-depth interview questions.

1.5 Limitations and Reflections on the Process

While the methodology aimed to deliver a balanced and representative assessment of the Tana Forum's impact over the past decade, a few limitations should be noted. For the stakeholder survey, out of the 32 individuals contacted to participate 16 responded, which is a 50% response rate. Although their insights were rich and informative, the average number of responses may affect the extent to which the findings reflect the broader stakeholder landscape.

Furthermore, despite outreach efforts, some high-profile figures and long-standing Forum contributors were unavailable or did not respond to requests for interviews or written reflections. This limited the inclusion of important senior perspectives that could have further enriched the assessment.

2. Historical Background and Institutional Context

2.1 Origins of the Tana Forum: Why It Was Established

The Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa was conceived as a response to a collective call by African leaders for African-led and African-owned solutions to the continent's peace and security challenges. Central to its establishment was the African Union's Declaration on the Elimination of Conflicts and the Promotion of Sustainable Peace in Africa—commonly known as the Tripoli Declaration of August 2009. In this declaration, African Heads of State and Government identified peace and security as a collective “intellectual challenge” and called for the formulation of “African-centred solutions.”

The Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) at Addis Ababa University took up this call and, in collaboration with key African thinkers and political leaders—including the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia, H.E. Meles Zenawi, former South African President, H.E. Thabo Mbeki, and former Nigerian President, H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo—established the Tana Forum in 2012.

The idea was sparked by a conviction that African security challenges required equally African-led, inclusive, and innovative spaces for frank discussion, away from the constraints of formal diplomatic settings. At the inaugural Forum in 2012, founding Chairperson H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo emphasised:

“This is the first time in the history of Africa that a distinguished group of leading multi-stakeholder personalities are meeting in an informal setting to discuss strategic peace and security challenges facing our continent... The Tana Forum challenges us to become ever more steadfast in pursuing the values and virtues of dialogue, justice, equity, and integrity.”¹

Similarly, H.E. Meles Zenawi, the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia, who co-conceived the idea with the late Prof. Andreas Eshetè, then President of Addis Ababa University, highlighted the need for a platform that, while informal, was deeply substantive:

¹ H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo. Speech at the First Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa, 2012. Available at Tana Forum, “Resources,” <https://tanaforum.org/archives/tana-2012/>.

“The Tana Peace Conference doesn’t make decisions or issue statements on African security issues. It limits itself to an open and varied discussion... without the inhibitions posed by the need to reach consensus... There are no winners and losers here — just people gathered for an uninhibited discussion.”²

The Forum was launched with the strong backing of the Government of Ethiopia. It was deliberately held in Bahir Dar, away from diplomatic capitals, to cultivate open and relaxed dialogue reminiscent of Africa’s tradition of meeting under the Baobab tree.³

2.2 Mission and Foundational Objectives

The Tana Forum was underpinned by a vision to offer a platform for frank, forward-looking, and inclusive dialogue on peace and security in Africa. It sought to enable informal, high-level engagement among Heads of State and Government, civil society, academics, and private sector actors to catalyse homegrown solutions to the continent’s most pressing security threats. As H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo declared at the first Forum:

“To effectively deal with the threats that Africa faces now and, in the future, there is a need to practically translate our common vision to complement the legal instruments and institutional mechanisms. This includes building a common spirit, a common language, and common motivations among all citizens in order to confront the present challenges as they emerge.”⁴

The Forum’s mission was not to make declarations or adopt communiqués, but rather to provide fertile ground for fresh thinking, policy engagement, and relationship building. The Late Professor Andreas Eshetè, the Forum’s first CEO, highlighted the Forum’s intent to go beyond formal structures:

“The Tana Forum is a departure from familiar meetings on Africa. The deliberations are unfettered by national and institutional mandates or

2 H. E. Meles Zenawi. Speech at the First Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa, 2012. Available at Tana Forum, “Resources,” <https://tanaforum.org/archives/tana-2012/>.

3 The baobab tree has long served in many African societies as a traditional meeting place where elders or community members would gather to discuss and resolve community matters. The Tana Forum explicitly adopts this symbolism: the baobab is positioned at its centre to evoke inclusive, open, and culturally founded dialogue on peace and security in Africa.

4 See note 1, above.

commitments... The hope is that the freedom from formal constraints and the wide-ranging array of participants will enable free, vigorous and rigorous examination of the problems.”

At its core, the Forum was designed to:

Provide opportunities to decision-making leaders and institutions to exchange experiences and insights on peace and security issues among themselves in the view of taking home inspirations and practical lessons;

- Create opportunities for political decision makers to interact and consult with a broad-based African constituency as well as with key global actors;
- Contribute to a substantive African open debate on peace and security issues of key and strategic importance to the continent and its regional institutions;
- Communicate with, and listen to, “profound Africa” on various dimensions and components of peace and security in the continent, thus facilitating an inclusive dialogue among governments and other African security stakeholder groups;
- Sensitize and mobilise other stakeholders, actors and the overall African opinion for large ownership of Africa-owned and led solutions on peace and security.

It was expected that, through the implementation of such a broad mission, the Forum would result long term in:

- Facilitating informal and innovative responses to Africa’s pressing peace and security challenges;
- Building an African voice for both the African and global security dialogues;
- Supporting the development of homegrown, African-led solutions to the continent’s security threats; and
- Sensitizing and mobilizing other stakeholders, actors, and the overall African public opinion for enlarged ownership of African-owned and led solutions on peace and security.

2.3 Political, Security, and Institutional Landscape at Inception

The Tana Forum was inaugurated at a time the continent was undergoing major political and security transformations. The continent was still reeling from the ripple effects of the Arab Spring and the fall of long-standing regimes. Libya had descended into post-intervention chaos, South Sudan had just gained independence, and Mali was on the brink of collapse due to a military coup and armed insurgency.

Domestically, many African states faced renewed questions about fragility, state legitimacy, and the growing influence of non-state armed actors. The need for a reflective space to examine these dynamics, outside official and bureaucratic frameworks, was evident.

At the institutional level, the African Union (AU) had, in the preceding decade, made notable strides through the establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the African Governance Architecture (AGA), and a stronger normative framework for peace and security. Yet the pace of conflict, coupled with resource constraints and the complexity of global interventions, meant that the continent needed more dynamic, independent, and responsive forums for exchange.

As Obasanjo noted at the inaugural Forum, “while so much has been done, so much is left to be done,” Noting that “*the recent events in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have shown that more than ever before, Africans need to speak with a common and strong voice*”. The Tana Forum sought to be that voice—a mechanism that could complement continental instruments while enabling the urgent reflection and relationship-building necessary for prevention and response.

2.4 How the Forum Was Intended to Complement the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)

From the outset, the Tana Forum was intended not as a replacement but as a strategic complement to Africa’s existing peace and security mechanisms, particularly the APSA. While APSA provides the normative and institutional frameworks for peace and security—such as early warning, mediation, and peace support operations—Tana carved out a unique niche: it fostered high-level, off-the-record, and anticipatory dialogue on critical issues, often before they became mainstream agenda items. As the late H.E. Meles Zenawi explained:

“The Tana Peace Conference is not intended to duplicate or replace the work of our already existing institutions, but to supplement and reinforce them... “

Rather than issue declarations or enforce consensus, Tana’s informal, inclusive format enables deep, reflective discourse—an intellectual and political contribution to APSA. The Late Prof. Eshetè elaborated at the inaugural conference that the Forum aimed to stretch *“the limits of legitimate public deliberation”* and provide a venue where *“leaders and ordinary citizens [engage] in reflective conversation on peace,”* helping to sustain *“a culture of peace among ordinary citizens”*—a vital complement to state-led security mechanisms.

3. Assessing Alignment with the Founding Vision

3.1 Strategic Focus and Relevance Over Time

The founding philosophy of the Tana Forum—to serve as a platform for candid, African-led dialogue on peace and security—remains highly relevant, particularly as the continent confronts evolving security threats and geopolitical complexities.

One respondent affirms the enduring relevance of Tana’s original philosophy, noting that “despite fluctuations in influence and participation, the foundational ideals of the Forum remain pertinent, especially in today’s evolving security landscape.”

The Forum has maintained thematic relevance through deliberate alignment with the African Union’s annual themes and by addressing emerging issues like violent extremism, digital security, and youth engagement. Ms. Tembo-Longwe, the current head of the secretariat underscored that the Forum has stayed aligned with its founding vision by continuously addressing pertinent peace and security issues across the continent. She noted that they’ve implemented Tana Forum in the past ten editions on relevant topics—aligning these thematic areas each year to those focused by the African Union. This alignment with AU priorities confirms Tana’s sustained relevance as a complementary platform to formal AU institutions.

Also, the publication of over ten State of Peace and Security in Africa yearly

reports, forty-six Tana policy papers and implementation of pre- and post-forum consultations with experts and stakeholders have helped consolidate a growing continental community of peace and security actors, keeping Tana intellectually vibrant and strategically connected. Michelle Ndiaye, Former Head of Tana Secretariat affirmed that Tana’s content has informed and shaped AU discussions, contributing to its intellectual mandate.

Similarly, Ambassador Bankole observed that the Forum’s relevance has also been seen in its attention to underexplored or emerging themes—such as the nexus between environmental degradation and insecurity, youth inclusion, digital threats, health security, and African agency in global governance. Noting that “these align closely with AU efforts such as the Climate Security Nexus Framework and the Africa CDC’s post-pandemic strategies”.

4. Influence on Peace and Security Narrative and Discourse in Africa

Survey responses reveal a generally positive perception of the Forum’s influence: 86% of respondents believed that Tana has shifted the discourse to some, *considerable*, or *great extent*. This view is corroborated by the Forum’s long-standing role as a high-level platform for open, African-led dialogue on issues often excluded from formal diplomatic or AU proceedings.

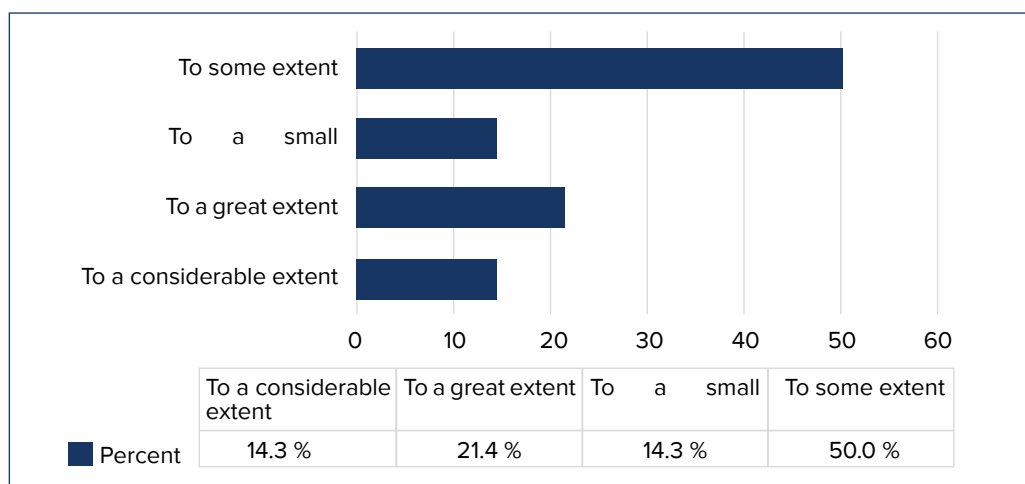


Figure 1: Influence on Peace and Security Narrative and Discourse

According to Ambassador Bankole, Tana has played a strategic role in “*shifting the African peace and security narrative from one of reactive crisis management to one of anticipatory dialogue and proactive solutions.*” This evolution is evident in the Forum’s recent emphasis on non-traditional security threats—such as environmental degradation, youth exclusion, and public health—thereby contributing to the growing prominence of human security in Africa’s peacebuilding discourse.

This thematic innovation was also noted by survey respondents, many of whom cited “*new themes prioritised*” and “*the recognition of African agency, youth inclusion, and civil society engagement as key shifts in the conversation*”. One respondent described Tana as “*enabling discussions of key priorities on peace and security on the continent*” and serving as “*a link between policymakers and civil society.*” Others credited the Forum for strengthening the influence of African think tanks in policy dialogue, stating it has “strengthened their relationship to the AU and national governments.”

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo emphasised the value of Tana’s informal model in facilitating these shifts. “*The Forum has helped amplify African voices in both regional and global security dialogues,*” he noted. By creating space for open, non-official discussion among decision-makers, civil society actors, and scholars, Tana has enabled the development and dissemination of African-generated solutions—enhancing local ownership and legitimacy of peace processes. He also highlighted the Forum’s success in “*mobilising diverse stakeholders... and fostering trust among key security actors.*”

However, the Forum’s influence has not been without limitations. Some respondents noted a loss of momentum in recent years, attributing it to postponements and declining diversity of voices. Others emphasised the importance of strengthening follow-up mechanisms to ensure that the Forum’s insights are more effectively translated into national policies and continental frameworks.

Ms. Tembo-Longwe, the Head of the Secretariat, acknowledged these concerns, noting that while Tana consistently prioritizes relevant themes—often aligned with AU priorities—greater effort is needed to ensure that Forum outcomes inform practical policies action on the continent. “*We’ve discussed/dialogued, we have published, we’ve networked. Some participants even gotten funding and or jobs through the Forum indicating participation benefit goes beyond policy influencing,* she said, “*but what next? What do we do with the outcomes? How*

can we best translate these into policies, research, and training that help our people across the board?”

In sum, the Tana Forum has played a critical role in advancing a more holistic, inclusive, and African-led peace and security discourse. Its early impact was particularly pronounced, creating space for frank, high-level dialogue on governance, state fragility, and regional stability. Today, its continued relevance depends on its ability to evolve—deepening stakeholder diversity, ensuring follow-through on policy recommendations, and safeguarding African ownership amidst complex donor dynamics.

4.1 Thematic Contributions to African Security Agendas

Tana Forum has made demonstrable contributions to reshaping the African peace and security agenda. Through its annual themes, policy dialogues, and pre/post-Forum consultations, Tana has positioned itself as a unique, agenda-setting platform that integrates conventional and emerging security challenges.

From the early emphasis on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in response to the 2011 Libya crisis, the Forum has evolved to cover a broad spectrum of issues—including youth and women in peacebuilding, natural resource governance, digital security, climate change, and pandemic-related risks. According to H.E. Obasanjo, *“The Tana Forum has promoted an African-centered approach and amplified African voices in both regional and global security dialogues.”*

As one respondent noted, *“The Forum has highlighted African agency... [and] how it can be leveraged in policymaking.”* Another emphasised that it *“strengthened the position of think tanks and their relationship to national and continental institutions like the AU.”*

Tana’s ability to engage emerging threats—such as unconstitutional changes of government (UCGs), authoritarian resurgence, climate insecurity, and health crises—was particularly affirmed by H.E Bankole. He noted that the Forum *“placed UCGs within the broader context of governance failures and youth discontent”* and commended its alignment with AU frameworks like the Climate Security Nexus and Africa CDC initiatives.

5. Policy Influence

Qualitative and quantitative Survey data on policy influence suggests limited but noticeable impact of the Tana Forum on peace and security policymaking. 21.4% of respondents felt the Forum had influenced policy “to a great” or “considerable” extent at the continental, regional, or national levels. A larger share—28.6%—rated the influence as occurring “to some extent,” while 21.4% believed it occurred only “to a small extent.” Notably, 28.6% of respondents did not provide any response, which may reflect either uncertainty about the Forum’s concrete policy outcomes or limited direct engagement with policymaking spaces.

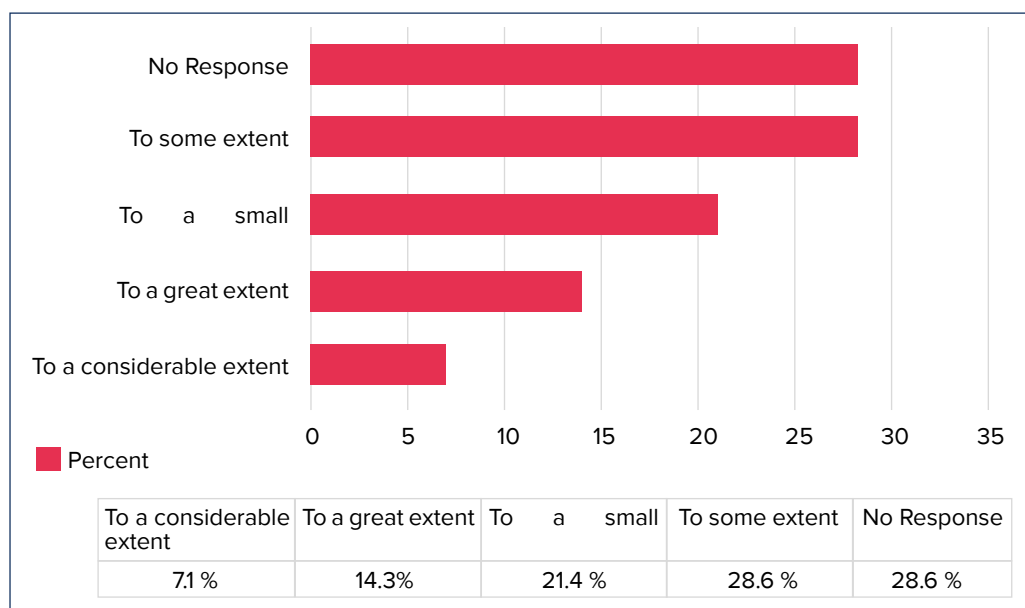


Figure 2: Perceptions on Policy Influence

This distribution suggests that while the Forum is recognised as a platform for dialogue and agenda-setting, its role in shaping or influencing concrete policies remains modest and indirect. This aligns with qualitative feedback indicating that Tana’s greatest value lies in shifting narratives and convening thought leaders.

5.1 Indirect but Strategic Influence

Several respondents emphasised that Tana’s primary contribution lies in shaping discourse and thinking among African policymakers, civil society, and

development partners. As one respondent noted: *“The impact on policymaking is indirect – much of the Forum’s impact is through shaping discourse and providing intellectual frameworks rather than direct policy adoption.”* This is echoed in the comment by another respondent, *“Like other fora, it forces us to think more critically.”* This suggests that Tana serves as a thinking space, where issues are framed, unpacked, and re-contextualized in a way that can eventually filter into formal strategies and institutional decisions.

While attribution remains a challenge, there is credible evidence of indirect and sometimes direct influence on policy formulation.

5.2 Influence on Specific Policy Frameworks

A few respondents cited concrete examples of policies shaped or informed by Forum dialogue. These include:

- African Union Transitional Justice Policy: One respondent noted that this policy drew from Tana’s emphasis on blending traditional mediation practices with international norms—a key thematic focus of past Forums.
- The Ethiopia Peace Process: While the role of Tana may not have been central, this respondent acknowledged its contribution to the broader intellectual and diplomatic ecosystem that shaped the environment around peace negotiations.
- The 2017 Forum’s spotlight on Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs): this catalyzed AU-wide action during the 2018 “Year of Anti-Corruption.” According to Ambassador Bankole, *“That discussion informed both national policy reviews and reinforced AU-wide commitments to closing leakages in natural resource governance.”*
- Natural resource-based conflict prevention in the Sahel and Great Lakes were— informed by Tana’s discussions on state fragility.
- Several themes raised at Tana, such as governance fragility, youth inclusion, and elections and conflict prevention, have strongly influenced AGA’s policy dialogues and country-level programming.
- APRM assessments in certain countries have incorporated insights earlier debated at Tana, especially regarding institutional legitimacy and citizen trust according to Ambassador Bankole
- Health-security governance – aligned with Africa CDC during the COVID-19 crisis.

- Climate security framing – reinforced by the Forum’s integration of environmental degradation in security discourse.

5.3 Value to Development Partners

An insightful contribution by another respondent underscored how the Forum’s discussions have served development partners, embassies, and civil society organizations: *“Conversations at the Tana Forum provide development partners with critical insights into thematic issues that need to be advanced by the AU and CSOs.”* This illustrates Tana’s utility in agenda-setting and strategic alignment—especially in influencing how partners think about resourcing, programme design, and advocacy.

In summary, while the Forum’s direct influence on policy remains largely informal and advisory, its contribution to thought leadership, thematic prioritisation, and framing of African solutions is widely acknowledged. Its influence lies in shaping critical reflection, priority-setting, and discourse. It acts as a policy incubator, where issues are framed, contested, and socialised—paving the way for more formal adoption down the line. As one respondent put it, “It is a platform that shapes minds, not mandates—but minds shape mandates.”

6. Assessing African Ownership, Exchange, and Leadership in Peace and Security

Findings from the stakeholder survey and high-level interviews affirm that Tana remains a valued space for dialogue. At the same time, they highlight opportunities to further strengthen African ownership, enhance follow-through, and balance donor engagement. These dynamics are discussed below.

6.1 To what extent has the Tana Forum helped centre African voices in global peace and security conversations?

When asked about the extent to which the Tana Forum has contributed to centering African perspectives in global debates, 92.9% of survey respondents acknowledged that it had done so at least to some extent. The majority see this contribution as moderate to strong rather than transformational, suggesting a

positive but still evolving impact. Specifically, 42.9% indicated that the Forum contributed “to some extent,” 28.6% said “to a great extent,” and 14.3% described the impact as “considerable.” Importantly, no respondents felt that the Forum had only contributed “to a small extent” or “not at all.” The distribution shows that while Tana is valued for providing a platform for African perspectives, there is room to deepen its global influence and visibility.

Qualitative data highlighted the Forum’s ability to elevate themes often neglected in traditional multilateral settings, placing African experiences and insights at the forefront of the debate. Yet, concerns emerged around the durability of this influence. Stakeholders noted the need to keep this focus strong over time, stressing the importance of including more African voices. These views show that Tana has a chance to strengthen African leadership even further, while still working closely with international partners.

6.2 To what extent has the Tana Forum promoted African-led solutions to peace and security challenges?

The question of African-led solutions is closely tied to the Forum’s credibility. Survey responses reflect cautious optimism: 42.8% of respondents said the Forum promoted African-led responses to a “great” or “considerable extent,” while another 42.9% selected “some extent.” This suggests that while African agency is present, it has not yet been fully institutionalised.

6.3 What steps could further strengthen African ownership of peace and security solutions?

In response to this open-ended question, stakeholders proposed a series of concrete actions: These include:

- **Re-anchor the Forum in its founding vision of African agency:** Many respondents called for Tana to rethink its identity and long-term purpose. As noted by one respondent, “Tana is at a crossroads and must rethink its identity. A bolder, African-funded, results-oriented Forum is required.”
- **Strengthen Follow-Up Mechanisms:** Stakeholders see an opportunity to maximise the Forum’s impact by building stronger systems to track recommendations and showcase results.
- **Expand Civil Society and Youth Participation:** Respondents called for involving

AU ECOSOCC, youth groups, and grassroots movements in more meaningful ways, ensuring their voices actively shape Forum outcomes

- **Adopt Innovative Dialogue Formats:** Respondents encouraged experimenting with more interactive format that enable deeper, franker dialogue—ideally attended in personal rather than institutional capacities.
- **Direct Engagement with Conflict Actors:** A bold proposal was for the Forum to serve as a space for informal engagement with conflict parties, thereby enhancing its relevance for preventive diplomacy.
- **Consistency and Reliability:** Given the Forum’s recent postponements, participants highlighted the importance of predictability. As one respondent said: “The Tana Forum is a great event—if it actually takes place.”

In summary, Tana must actively safeguard its autonomy, prioritise African leadership, and embed follow-up mechanisms that translate dialogue into impact in order to remain relevant and trusted.

7. Cross sectoral collaboration and inclusivity of the Forum

7.1 The Forum’s contribution to fostering cross-sectoral collaboration

Cross-sectoral collaboration emerged as one of the Forum’s strongest assets. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64.3%) rated Tana’s contribution to collaboration as “high” (42.9%) or “very high” (21.4%). This was reinforced by multiple interviewees. Ambassador Bankole praised the Forum’s ability to: “Break silos between political leadership, civil society, academic research, and international partners... democratising access to peace and security dialogue and giving voice to those often excluded from high-level summits.”

Dr. Jide Okeke similarly emphasised Tana’s informal, horizontal architecture as a rare strength in African multilateralism. Former President Obasanjo also pointed to the Forum’s capacity to engage civil society and mobilise dialogue on emerging challenges such as climate crises, authoritarian resurgence, and unconstitutional changes of government.

Nonetheless, critiques remain. The diversity of actors has not always translated into action or inclusion. Some respondents suggested that the format of sessions had grown increasingly formal and performative, limiting genuine participation. One proposed that:

“People should attend in their personal capacity as contributors to peace and security—not merely representing institutions.”

7.2 Inclusivity and Diversity of Voices

Feedback from survey respondents on the diversity of voices paints a moderately positive picture. While a combined 64.3% of respondents described the Forum as either “Inclusive” or “Very Inclusive,” only 21.4% placed it in the highest category of “Very Inclusive.” Notably, 35.7% of respondents rated the Forum as only “Somewhat Inclusive.” These findings correlate with qualitative responses, where respondents provided a range of perspectives on which groups are underrepresented at the Tana Forum and offered suggestions for improving inclusivity.

Several stakeholder groups identified persistent gaps in representation at the Tana Forum, including youth, (often present but only symbolically), non-elite women, African cultural practitioners, people with disabilities, traditional and religious communities, and the African diaspora. Respondents emphasised that these voices are vital for enriching the Forum’s relevance and impact. To address these gaps, stakeholders recommended broadening outreach beyond elite circles, setting inclusion benchmarks, integrating youth and women meaningfully into the agenda, diversifying panels, tracking participation data, and partnering with organisations that work directly with marginalised communities.

In responding to critiques that the Tana Forum is inaccessible to broader constituencies, the Head of the Tana Secretariat firmly pushes back on such characterisations. She notes that while the Forum is intentionally designed to attract high-level decision-makers—including Heads of State, policymakers, and continental experts—it has consistently made efforts to ensure a diverse range of stakeholders are included in both its planning and proceedings.

She emphasised that *“the high-level nature of the Forum is purposeful—we need to engage those who make decisions on peace and security in Africa. But that does not mean we exclude others. We deliberately invite and include representatives from civil society, youth leaders, and women’s groups at all*

levels.” Ms Tembo-Longwe’s response aligns with insights from Secretariat staff about the evolving attendance patterns of Forum participants.

7.3 Evolving Participation and Its Implications on the Quality of Dialogue

Survey responses from Secretariat staff suggest that the Tana Forum has experienced a perceptible shift in the composition and size of its participants. This transformation reflects both growing relevance and emerging tensions around format and quality.

Recent iterations have seen a notable increase in the participation of thematic experts and professionals—many of whom actively seek to attend and are willing to self-finance their involvement.

This growing interest among experts and practitioners from various sectors, while an indicator of Tana’s expanding visibility and perceived relevance, has also come with unintended consequences. Stakeholders across the spectrum—including staff, have observed that the Forum’s reach has extended beyond its original scope. The increase in self-sponsored participation has, in some cases, diluted the quality and intimacy of the discussions. What was once a unique and informal setting for candid, solutions-focused dialogue among African leaders and thinkers is now at risk of becoming overcrowded and performative.

Respondents noted that this broader reach has not always translated into more meaningful or inclusive conversations. While the Forum has made deliberate efforts to bring in youth, women, and other marginalised groups, concerns remain about the depth and sincerity of their inclusion. Several respondents pointed to the presence of these groups as often symbolic, used to tick boxes rather than to genuinely engage with their perspectives.

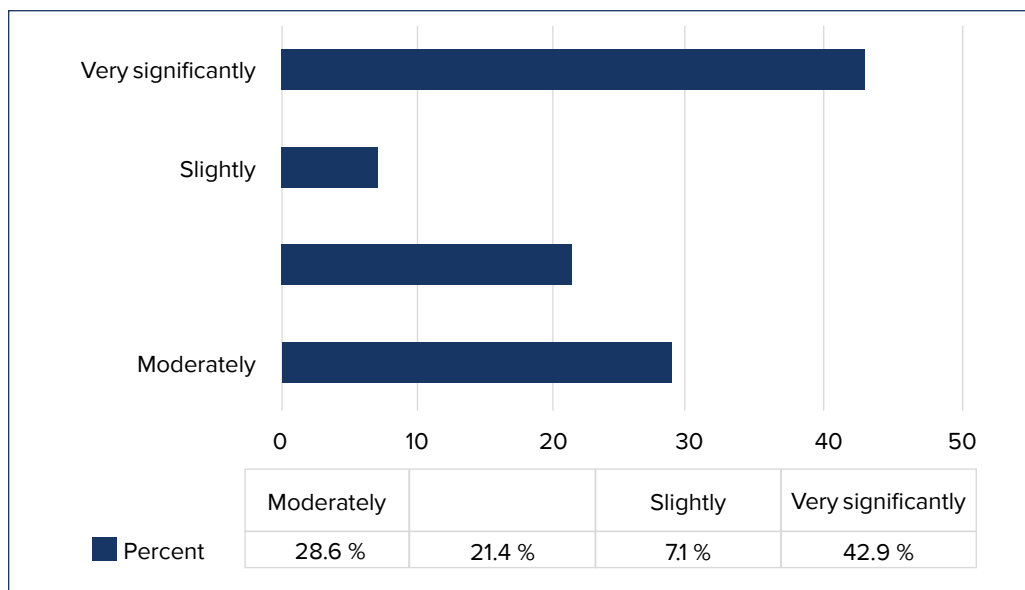
Some participants who feel that while representation has improved visually, the substance of inclusion remains lacking. Moreover, the influx of diverse voices, though commendable in theory, has sometimes shifted the Forum away from its core function as a space for high-level political and intellectual exchange. With the growing number of attendees—many of whom may not have direct decision-making power or deep policy experience—the discussions risk becoming less focused, more superficial, and unable to deliver the bold, actionable insights that defined the Forum’s earlier years.

8. Value and Relevance of Forum Engagement for Participants

Feedback from surveyed participants underscores the Forum's continued value in deepening understanding of peace and security issues, thematically resonating with diverse actors.

8.1 Deepening Understanding of Peace and Security in Africa

The majority of respondents to the survey strongly affirmed the Forum's educational and knowledge-sharing value. When asked how significantly their participation had deepened their understanding of peace and security in Africa, nearly two-thirds (64.3%) said it had done so either "very significantly" (42.9%) or "significantly" (21.4%). An additional 28.6% described the impact as moderate, meaning that over 92% of all respondents experienced at least a moderate increase in their understanding as a result of engaging with the Forum.



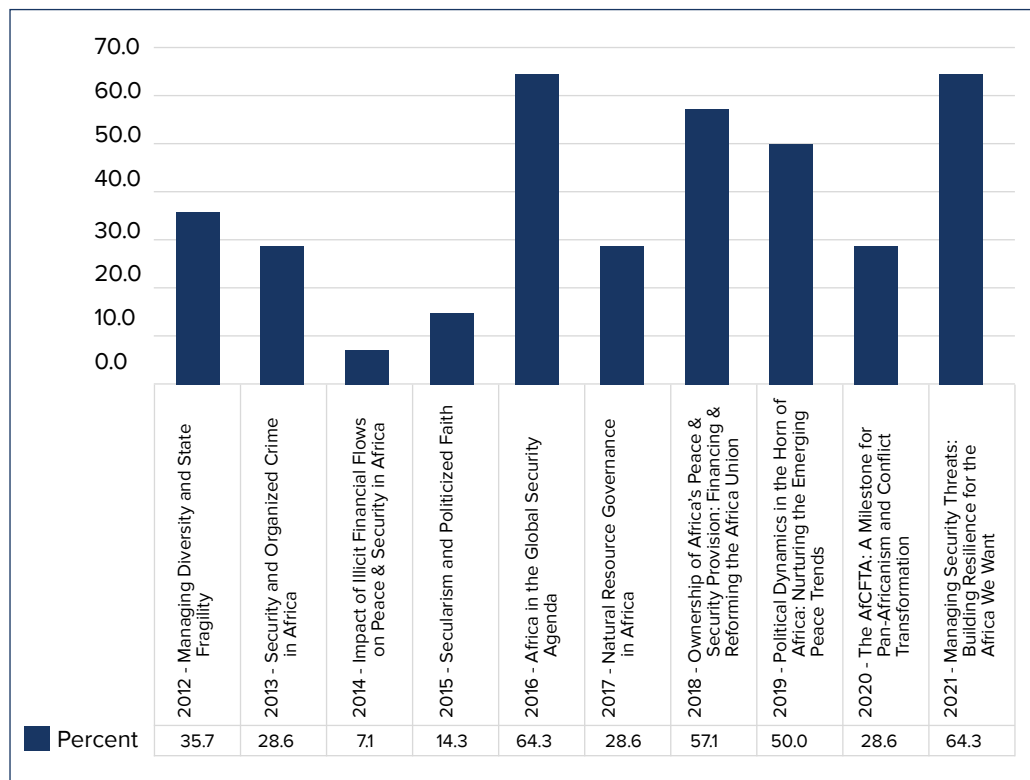
This overwhelming positive feedback reinforces the Forum's importance as a continental space for continuous learning and cross-sector dialogue.

8.2 Relevance of Forum Themes to Stakeholder Priorities

When asked which Forum themes over the years were most relevant to their work or interests, participants highlighted a clear preference for cross-cutting, forward-looking topics that speak to Africa's global positioning and internal resilience. Two themes emerged as the most widely relevant, each was selected by 64.3% of respondents:

- “Africa in the Global Security Agenda” (2016) and
- “Managing Security Threats: Building Resilience for the Africa We Want” (2022)

These topics show participants are interested in how Africa navigates international security landscapes and builds long-term, homegrown solutions to its own challenges. Stakeholders appreciate when Tana addresses issues with both strategic depth and practical application.



Other highly rated themes included:

- “Ownership of Africa’s Peace and Security Provision: Financing and Reforming the AU” (2018) – selected by 57.1%, and
- “Political Dynamics in the Horn of Africa” (2019) – chosen by 50.0% of respondents.

These themes highlight the Forum’s relevance in convening timely conversations on institutional reform, regional geopolitics, and African agency.

Moderate interest was observed for topics such as: State fragility and diversity (2012); Organized crime (2013), Natural resource governance (2017), and Economic integration through AfCFTA (2020). Each attracting between 28.6% and 35.7% of selections. These topics appear to appeal more to sector-specific interests or were less immediately pressing at the time of the survey.

Notably, two themes attracted limited engagement: Illicit Financial Flows (2014) (7.1%) and Secularism and Politicized Faith (2015) (14.3%). Despite their policy relevance particularly IFFs, which has shaped continental discussions—these themes may have felt more niche.

8.3 Gaps Between Learning and Application

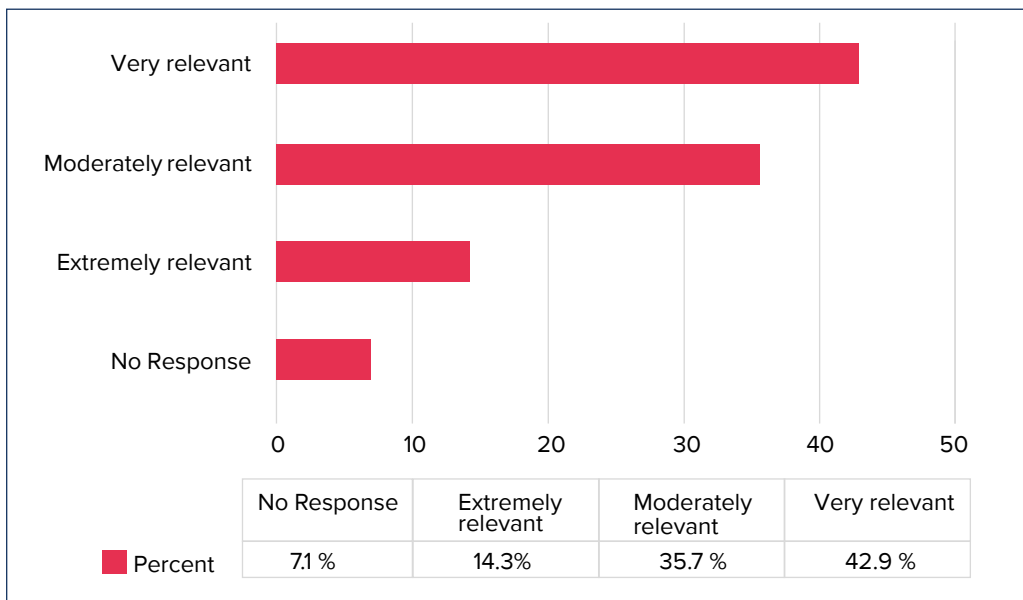
While the data points to Tana’s strong influence on knowledge and thematic alignment, there is a notable gap when it comes to translating insights into institutional action. When asked whether they had applied any lessons or insights gained from the Forum in their work or institutions, only 2 14.3% of respondents answered yes. The remaining 85.7% indicated they had not applied Forum learnings in any direct or structured way.

This reveals a disconnection between what participants are learning and what they are able—or empowered—to do with that knowledge within their organisational or institutional settings. This suggests that Forum content, while rich and engaging, may remain at a high policy or conceptual level, limiting its immediate practical application. These findings offer important lessons for the Forum’s future direction. While its value as a knowledge and dialogue platform is undisputed, Tana must now consider how to extend its impact beyond the annual convening.

9. Evaluation of Forum Recommendations and Knowledge Products

9.1 Relevance of Forum Recommendations

The survey responses indicate that the Tana Forum's recommendations are largely perceived as relevant to ongoing peace and security concerns across the continent. With over 90% of respondents acknowledging at least moderate relevance, and nearly 43% rating the recommendations as “very relevant,” it is evident that the Forum continues to serve as a meaningful contributor to dialogue and direction in the peace and security landscape. The moderate scores, however, point to an opportunity for the Forum to strengthen the timeliness, implementation pathways, and visibility of its recommendations to further enhance their impact.



9.2 Gaps Between Recommendations and Implementation

A consistent theme emerging from respondent feedback is the existence of significant gaps between the Tana Forum’s recommendations and their implementation. Respondents emphasised a “disconnect” between what is proposed at the Forum and what is eventually actioned, indicating that the translation of ideas into practice remains a core challenge.

9.2.1 Lack of Political Will and Executive Commitment

A dominant explanation for this implementation gap is insufficient political will. Respondents cited “political leadership deficiencies” and a “lack of commitment from executives” as central barriers. Several highlighted that Forum papers and recommendations are “not very much acted upon,” reflecting a lack of prioritisation or championing by those in positions of power. This political inertia undermines the potential impact of Forum outcomes, regardless of the quality of recommendations.

9.2.2 Insufficient Mechanisms for Follow-up

Respondents also pointed to structural limitations within the Forum process itself, including the absence of concrete, actionable steps and insufficient follow-up mechanisms. While the Forum is valued for facilitating high-level dialogue and surfacing critical issues, many noted that maintaining momentum after the event remains difficult. Without detailed implementation plans or assigned institutional responsibility, many outcomes remain aspirational rather than operational.

9.3 Suggested Remedies

Respondents suggested the Forum should adopt clearer frameworks for tracking implementation, perhaps through annual scorecards, or integration with AU organs tasked with peace and security mandates.

9.4 Cumulative Analysis of Tana Forum Knowledge Products

Survey respondents were asked to rate the relevance and quality of four key Tana Forum knowledge products: the State of Peace and Security in Africa (SPSA) Report, Tana Policy Papers, Tana Essay Papers, and the Tana Forum Outcomes Report. The feedback across these products was overwhelmingly positive, though

with varying degrees of interest and engagement, providing useful insight into their relative strengths and areas for improvement.

9.4.1 Strongest Performer: SPSA Report

The State of Peace and Security in Africa (SPSA) Report emerged as the most highly rated product. All respondents gave it a positive rating, with 42.9% rating it “Excellent”, and a combined 57.2% rating it “Very Good” or “Good.” These results underscore the SPSA’s standing as a flagship publication.

9.4.1.1 Tana Policy Papers: Highly Regarded but Room for Growth

The Tana Policy Papers also received uniformly positive feedback, with 35.7% rating them “Excellent”, and 42.9% rating them “Very Good” indicating that they are widely seen as useful and relevant. However, the tilt toward “Very Good” over “Excellent” may suggest that while the papers are appreciated, they could benefit from enhancements in presentation, practical applicability, or distribution to further elevate their impact.

9.4.2 Outcomes Report: Solid, but Uneven Awareness

The Tana Forum Outcomes Report was similarly well-received, with 71.5% of respondents rating it either “Very Good” or “Excellent.” However, 7.1% gave no response, suggesting some variation in engagement or familiarity with the product. The report’s balanced reception—42.9% “Very Good”, 28.6% “Excellent”, and 21.4% “Good”—signals that it is considered a credible synthesis of Forum proceedings, though possibly in need of clearer structure or stronger linkage to post-Forum advocacy and implementation pathways.

9.4.3 Essay Papers: Positive but Less Impactful

The Tana Essay Papers received the most modest ratings. Although no negative assessments were recorded, only 14.3% rated them “Excellent,” while a majority (50%) rated them simply as “Good.” This suggests that the essay papers are viewed as useful but less influential compared to other knowledge products.

The cumulative feedback highlights that Tana Forum knowledge products are broadly appreciated and seen as valuable contributions to peace and security discourse in Africa.

9.5 Improving the Dissemination and Impact of Tana Forum Knowledge Products

Respondents offered a variety of actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing both the reach and effectiveness of the Tana Forum's knowledge products. These include:

9.5.1 Diversify and Expand Dissemination Channels

Several respondents suggested wider and more strategic dissemination of Tana's knowledge outputs, including hosting dissemination events in key African capitals such as Nairobi, Dakar, and Johannesburg and increasing visibility through social media, digital platforms, and traditional media outlets.

9.5.2 Integrate Products into Interactive Forum Activities

Respondents also recommended embedding the knowledge products into the Forum's core programming through interactive tools such as mentimeter, small-group roundtable exercises, and workshops that encourage participants to test, critique, and contribute to the data from their own local or regional contexts.

9.5.3 Strategic Stakeholder Targeting

Another suggestion was for targeted outreach to institutions that are well-positioned to implement or influence policy. Suggestions included: direct engagement with key institutions post-Forum; tailored dissemination to relevant actors in government, academia, and civil society.

9.5.4 Follow-Up Forums and Continued Dialogue

Finally, there was strong support for regular, post-Forum engagements to maintain momentum and encourage continued reflection on the knowledge products. Recommendations included: policy roundtables and regional events; more regular online forums to keep the conversation alive beyond the annual Forum; post-forum events specifically dedicated to unpacking and promoting the findings of key publications.

10. Evaluation of Pre-and Post-Forum Activities

10.1 Assessment of Pre- and Post-Forum Events in Contributing to Forum Objectives

Survey responses indicate that the pre- and -post-forum activities, such as expert meetings, public lectures, and side events, are widely seen as valuable in advancing the Forum's overall objectives.

40% percent of respondents rated their contribution as very significant, while an additional 20% considered it significant. This means that a combined 60% view these activities as playing an important role in deepening discussions, sustaining engagement, and expanding the Forum's reach beyond the main annual event.

A further 20% rated the contribution as moderate, suggesting that while these activities are appreciated, there is scope to increase their alignment with the Forum's strategic goals or to enhance their visibility and impact. The remaining 20% did not respond, which could indicate either a lack of direct engagement with these activities or limited awareness of their outcomes.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of sustaining and possibly expanding pre- and post-forum programming as a means to maintain momentum, broaden participation, and reinforce the Forum's influence year-round.

10.2 Most Effective Activities and Products for Engagement, Visibility, and Influence

When asked which specific activities and products were most effective for engagement, visibility, and influence, respondents identified a diverse set of activities and products as being most effective in strengthening the Tana Forum's engagement, visibility, and influence.

Across the responses, several initiatives emerged as recurring favourites:

a. State of Peace and Security Report – Flagship Influence

The State of Peace and Security Report emerged as the most frequently cited product (25%). Its centrality reflects its role as a substantive, evidence-based resource that informs regional and continental discourse.

b. Cluster of High-Impact Engagement Platforms

Three activities tied for second place at 18.75% each—Expert Meetings, Press Briefings & Ambassador Sessions, and the Munich Security Conference Side Event.

- Expert Meetings provide in-depth, technical exchanges that strengthen the Forum’s intellectual and policy relevance.
- Press Briefings & Ambassador Sessions enhance media and diplomatic visibility.
- The Munich Security Conference Side Event positions Tana within a global security dialogue, increasing its international profile and strategic partnerships.

c. Outcomes Documents

Outcomes Documents/Final Reports matched the 18.75% recognition of several engagement platforms, indicating their importance in consolidating discussions into actionable insights.

d. Moderate Engagement Activities

The Meles Zenawi Lecture Series and Lake Side Chats each accounted for 12.5% of responses, suggesting moderate recognition of their effectiveness. These platforms enable inclusive discussion and relationship-building but may have less sustained visibility compared to flagship products.

e. Niche and Symbolic Contributions

A range of activities received lower recognition (6.25% each), including Awareness Raising Campaigns, Multi-stakeholder Dialogues, Public Lectures at Bahir Dar University, Op-eds by Regional Fellows, and the Annual Book Launch. While these initiatives may have important symbolic, academic, or advocacy value, their perceived influence appears limited, likely due to smaller audiences or less direct policy linkage.

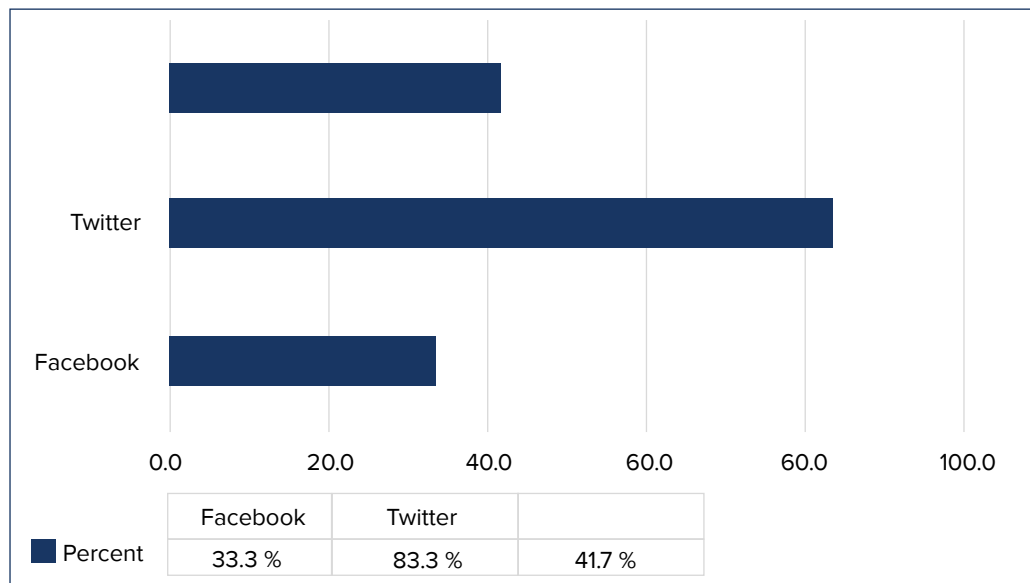
These results suggest that the most valued activities combine high-level intellectual engagement (Expert Meetings, State of Peace & Security Report) with strategic communication and outreach (Press Briefings, Ambassador Sessions, Munich Security Conference Side Event). This reinforces the need to prioritise both substantive policy content and proactive dissemination in multiple forums to sustain and grow Tana’s influence.

11. Visibility and Communication

The Tana Forum’s visibility, outreach, and influence are closely tied to its digital and social media presence. Survey data and interview insights point to both strengths and areas for growth in how the Forum communicates across Africa and beyond.

11.1 Current Patterns of Social Media Engagement

Among the various platforms, Twitter stands out as the Forum’s strongest channel, with 83.3% of respondents indicating they follow the Forum there. LinkedIn follows at 41.7%, presenting an important but under-leveraged space for reaching policymakers, researchers, and institutional partners. Facebook, with only 33.3% engagement, is the least-followed platform, suggesting it may be less relevant for professional audiences but still holds potential for engaging youth and grassroots communities in regions where it remains widely used.



11.2 Assessment of Online Presence

While the Forum’s social media activity provides a functional channel for communication, the overall digital presence is widely perceived as only “moderately engaging”. A notable 71.4% of respondents used this descriptor, while just 7.1% found the digital presence “extremely engaging,” and over 20%

expressed active disengagement. These findings highlight the Forum’s need to refresh its digital strategy and evolve beyond a static, event-focused model to one that offers more dynamic, inclusive, and interactive engagement.

11.2.1 Communication Limitations

Most of the Tana Forum’s content has been produced in English, inadvertently excluding portions of its Francophone audience. This has prompted repeated feedback from Francophone stakeholders calling for more inclusive communication strategies.

At the Forum itself, inclusivity is partly addressed through simultaneous interpretation in at least four languages—French, English, Arabic, and Amharic. Nonetheless, funding constraints have limited the Forum’s ability to translate outreach materials and recruit additional Francophone-speaking staff to sustain engagement beyond the event. These language and resource gaps have hampered the Forum’s ability to fully project its pan-African character in its communications and outreach activities.

Recommendations for Enhancing Digital Engagement and Communication

Stakeholders underscored the need for the Forum to build on its communications successes by broadening its reach, diversifying its formats, and ensuring inclusivity across languages and audiences. The recommendations below suggest practical ways to achieve this.

- Strengthen its continental reach and inclusivity by adopting a multi-language communication strategy that extends beyond the event itself. This could include producing key materials and media outputs in both English and French (and potentially Arabic and Portuguese), leveraging translation technology, and building partnerships with multilingual African media outlets.
- Proactive recruitment or secondment of bilingual staff to further bridge the language divide and ensure year-round engagement with diverse stakeholders.
- Develop a richer content strategy, focused on explainers, blogs, infographics, and short-form videos aligned with Forum themes and current events.
- Revitalize YouTube, using it as a hub for session highlights, speaker interviews, and translated materials to reach pan-African and international audiences.
- Introduce live digital programming such as “Tana Talks” or quarterly virtual

dialogues to maintain visibility and stakeholder engagement year-round.

- Forge strategic media partnerships with African broadcasters, digital outlets, and content creators to ensure broader dissemination in regional languages and across age groups.
- Establish clear impact metrics, using analytics tools and stakeholder surveys to assess whether digital activities are fostering knowledge exchange, policy relevance, and inclusive participation.

12. Successes and A Missed Opportunity

12.1 A Unique Convening Platform for African Voices

The Tana Forum’s most widely acknowledged achievement is its ability to convene diverse actors—ranging from Heads of State and Government to youth activists and academic researchers—around a common table. The Forum’s informal, and inclusive nature is consistently identified as one of its unique features. It avoids naming or shaming individual states, instead maintaining a continental perspective that encourages open dialogue without politicisation. Its independence from government control has enabled it to “create an open space for debate between officials, experts, and to some extent, business actors, especially in the early years.”

12.2 Institutional Recognition and Strategic Positioning

One of the Forum’s most tangible institutional achievements is its recognition on the African Union’s annual calendar, solidifying its position as a trusted and recurring space for strategic reflection. This status affirms the Forum’s relevance and legitimacy in Africa’s peace and security architecture. A senior stakeholder emphasised that Tana has become “a mainstay in the AU’s annual calendar of events and offers a platform for the meeting of minds across various sectors.” This consistent presence has enabled Tana to bridge formal policy institutions and informal civic voices, a role few other platforms play as effectively.

12.3 Elevating African Knowledge and Thought Leadership

The Forum has consistently invested in producing and profiling African-generated knowledge. Through its key knowledge products—such as the State of Peace and

Security in Africa (SPSA) Report, Policy Papers, Essay Papers, and the Outcomes Report—it has contributed to a growing body of research and analysis rooted in African perspectives.

Former head of Tana Secretariat, Michelle Ndiaye, reflected on this dimension, noting that the Forum has contributed to:

- “More research on peace and security programmes on the continent resulting in policy framing and changes;”
- “More content development and information-sharing on peace and security topics;”
- “More ownership and control over peace and security initiatives by African stakeholders.”

This intellectual production not only enhances the Forum’s credibility but also informs national and regional policy debates, particularly through the SPSA Report, which survey respondents rated positively in terms of relevance and quality.

12.4 A Catalyst for Networking, Informal Diplomacy, and Collaboration

The Forum has proven effective in providing a space for informal diplomacy and political dialogue. Several respondents highlighted the Tana Forum’s achievement in creating an environment where CSOs, African think tanks, experts and policymakers can interact directly, often in ways that official structures do not permit. One respondent described it as “*an informal space for policymakers and CSOs to engage on African peace and security issues*,” while another noted its strength in “*drawing on and profiling African knowledge and experience*”.

12.5 Promoting Awareness and Political Commitment

The Forum has also succeeded in raising awareness and generating political commitment on critical and emerging security issues. According to H.E. Obasanjo, the Forum has: “*Raised awareness of topical peace and security matters*;” Through carefully curated themes—ranging from state fragility and youth agency to natural resource governance and digital threats—the Forum has kept pace with shifting peace and security dynamics, contributing to agenda-setting across the continent.

12.6 Aspirations of Institutionalisation: A Missed Opportunity?

Since the inception of the Tana Forum in 2012, there has been a clear and consistent intention to institutionalise the Forum as an African-led platform for dialogue on peace and security. This intention was reaffirmed during the third Tana Board Meeting held in Bahir Dar on 25 April 2014, where board members unanimously agreed that the Forum, following its fifth edition, should transition into an independent initiative under the leadership of a dedicated structure — the Tana Foundation.

In 2016, this vision appeared to be on the verge of realisation when the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia at the time, H.E. Hailemariam Desalegn, formally announced the establishment of the Tana Foundation as a standalone entity. This was expected to mark a turning point, offering the Forum a more autonomous and sustainable institutional architecture to deepen its influence and secure its longevity.

However, despite this formal announcement and early momentum, the Tana Foundation has yet to become operational. Nearly a decade after the idea was first proposed, there is still no independent institutional entity anchoring the Forum. The absence of a fully functional foundation has limited the Forum's ability to mobilise diverse sources of funding, expand its activities year-round, and reinforce its strategic autonomy. For many stakeholders, this represents a significant missed opportunity — one that could have bolstered the Forum's credibility, sustainability, and policy impact.

The Secretariat, however, emphasises that the institutionalisation agenda remains very much alive. Both the Secretariat and the Tana Forum Board are actively following up with the host country, and all relevant establishment documents are currently under review by the Legal Counsel of the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry.

13. Barriers to the Forum's Effectiveness

13.1 Operational and structural challenges

Feedback from Secretariat staff and core stakeholders offers candid insight into the practical challenges encountered in delivering the Forum's mandate. These challenges can be grouped into five key areas: institutional capacity, funding, follow-up and impact measurement, political dynamics, and venue insecurity.

13.1.1 Institutional Capacity and Staffing

One of the most persistent challenges raised by staff is the ad hoc nature of the Secretariat's staff, which limits continuity, efficiency, and institutional memory. The reliance on short-term or temporary staffing arrangements especially during the Forum itself means that core planning, coordination, and follow-up functions are constrained by limited availability of full-time, dedicated personnel. A reliance on short-term or temporary staffing arrangements may hinder the Secretariat's ability to engage in year-round coordination, stakeholder engagement, and robust planning. This further highlight that the transition to a fully operational Tana Foundation—with its own dedicated staff and sustainable funding base—will directly address these challenges, enabling greater continuity and more robust institutional capacity in the future.

13.1.2 Chronic Funding Constraints

A recurring theme in staff responses is the Forum's persistent financial instability. Terms like “lack of sustainable funding” and “independent and reliable funding arrangement” point to a concern about the Forum's dependence on external donors. Survey responses reveal that budget limitations have consistently undermined both the quality and scope of the Forum. Staff note that funding gaps compromise the ability to bring high-level participants and experts to the table, limit logistical capacity, and restrict the Forum's reach and influence. This financial uncertainty is compounded by heavy reliance on a narrow pool of external donors. *This affects long-term planning and raises questions about independence and African ownership. In addition,* the political turnover in donor countries, such as Germany, has also led to wavering support and increased vulnerability to external shifts in priorities.

13.1.3 Gaps in Institutional Follow-Up and Measurement Mechanisms

Across multiple data points, staff underscore the absence of a systematic and institutionalised follow-up mechanism as the Forum's single greatest operational shortcoming. This challenge significantly limits the Forum's ability to track the uptake of its recommendations, evaluate its influence on policy, or communicate success in a compelling way. Staff note the limited institutional pathways for following up on recommendations, citing “member states' sovereignty,” “inaccessible APSA institutions,” and “diverse priorities” as key barriers. One respondent described “fully following up on outcomes” as nearly impossible under current arrangements. These limitations signal a broader challenge: the

Forum, while influential in setting agendas, lacks a formal mandate or institutional alignment with AU organs and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to transform ideas into implementation. Moreover, the intangible nature of the Forum's value—idea generation and narrative shaping—makes its influence difficult to quantify using traditional metrics. As one respondent noted, “Measuring impact is made difficult by the difficulty of measuring how ideas travel and find their way into policy or practice.”

13.1.4 Limited Private Sector Engagement

Another gap flagged by staff is the limited participation and support from the private sector, both as contributors and thought leaders. This has implications for both diversifying funding sources and broadening the thematic relevance of the Forum to include economic security, innovation, and youth employment.

In Summary, the Tana Forum faces intertwined operational, structural, and political challenges. While the Forum has carved a unique niche as a convening platform for dialogue on peace and security in Africa, its potential is undercut by chronic underfunding, staffing limitations, lack of follow-up mechanisms, and geopolitical instability.

13.2 Gaps Identified by Stakeholders: Enhancing Relevance, Influence, and Sustainability

Drawing on survey data and interviews with key contributors, this section synthesizes gaps identified by stakeholders that must be addressed to maintain and enhance the Forum's relevance, legitimacy, and impact over the next decade.

13.2.1 Institutional and Operational Stability

A primary concern among stakeholders is the Forum's recurrent postponements and scheduling uncertainty, particularly the deferment of the 11th Forum from 2023 to 2025. Respondents argue that this pattern has weakened the Forum's reliability, undermining its perceived institutional strength and credibility. To remedy this, stakeholders call for greater operational efficiency, accountability, and long-term planning capacity. As H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo, noted, “Enhancing operational efficiency and accountability is essential. Establishing a Foundation with clear metrics for success [is needed] to rebuild trust among stakeholders and to carry forward the Forum's tangible outcomes.”

13.2.2 Geographic Diversification and Venue Flexibility

Stakeholders advocate for greater flexibility in venue, including regional hosting models to expand reach and ensure continuity. According to Ambassador Bankole Adeoye. “The need to be flexible in venue choice without changing its name also requires urgent attention for consistency in scheduling.”

13.2.3 Bridging the Research–Policy Divide

A final gap identified is the lack of institutionalized mechanisms for translating ideas into practice. While the Forum excels in convening, it often falls short in transforming intellectual contributions into actionable outcomes. “We must close the gap between research and policy, perhaps by formalising knowledge transfer channels with national, regional, continental and global institutions.”—Ambassador Bankole Adeoye. “The Forum is about idea generation... but measuring how ideas travel and shape policy is difficult.” Stakeholders recommend formalising relationships with think tanks, AU technical bodies, and research institutions as part of both planning and post-forum processes.

14. Strategic Recommendations for the Future

14.1 Institutional and Strategic Recommendations for the Long-Term Sustainability of the Tana Forum

Reflections from various groups of stakeholders point to a need to reimagine and restructure the Tana Forum to ensure it remains not only relevant, but transformative in the face of Africa’s evolving peace and security challenges. The following recommendations, drawn from extensive internal surveys, staff feedback, and stakeholder interviews, chart a path forward for Tana’s transformation and long-term resilience.

14.1.1 Institutional Transformation: From Ad Hoc Structure to Independent Foundation

The most consistent and widely shared recommendation is the transformation of the Forum into a legally registered and autonomous foundation. This structural evolution is essential to reduce operational dependency on host government structures, expand programming, and ensure strategic continuity. Becoming a Foundation would:

- Enable the recruitment of permanent staff
- Support the creation of a long-term strategic plan
- Facilitate better follow-up mechanisms for Forum outcomes
- Allow for year-round programming
- Position the Forum as a credible continental institution

14.1.2 Diversified and African-Led Financing Models

Sustainability is contingent on financial independence. To reduce reliance on a narrow pool of donors or host government funding, stakeholders suggest that Tana diversify its financing base through African-led mechanisms, including:

- Core funding from the African Union and committed African governments
- Private sector partnerships aligned with Forum themes
- Structured alumni giving or legacy contributions
- Tap on more funding from private Foundations
- Founding an endowment fund to provide long-term stability
- Value-added services like training, research, and consultancy offerings beyond the annual event

14.2 Reimagining the Forum's Hosting and Convening Model

The Forum's overdependence on a single host country has led to credibility gaps and uncertainty. To reaffirm its continental identity and ensure consistency: Stakeholders suggest rotating the Forum African subregions every 2–3 years to deepen pan-African ownership

14.3 Strengthening Intellectual and Policy Impact

The Tana Forum must evolve from a space for dialogue to a platform for influence. To enhance its thought leadership and policy relevance, the Forum should:

- Align Forum themes with real-time policy and governance challenges
- Institutionalize mechanisms to track the uptake of Forum recommendations
- Develop and circulate policy briefs to AU organs, RECs, and Member States

- Strengthen linkages with African think tanks and universities
- Build South–South partnerships with forums in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East

14.4 Deepening Inclusivity and Shared Stakeholder Ownership

While inclusivity has been a core principle of Tana, there is a need to move beyond symbolic representation to meaningful integration of diverse voices:

- Institutionalize the active involvement of youth, women, and CSOs in shaping the agenda and follow-up actions
- Ensure African governments take leadership on setting themes and driving implementation
- Engage past participants in structured follow-up mechanisms
- Reframe inclusivity to be intentional, not performative, with clear space for marginalised voices to shape outcomes

14.5 Enhanced Digital Infrastructure and Year-Round Visibility

The Forum must embrace digital platforms as a tool for year-round engagement, especially with younger and more dispersed audiences. Priorities include:

- Creating interactive multimedia content (e.g., podcasts, YouTube videos)
- Hosting virtual roundtables and regional dialogues
- Launching a central knowledge portal for past reports, policy briefs, and proceedings
- Enhancing social media strategy, particularly on Twitter and LinkedIn, where engagement is strongest

14.6 Institutionalising Pre- and Post-Forum Processes

To maximize impact and improve continuity, the Forum should:

- Expand pre-Forum consultations and stakeholder dialogues across regions
- Systematically track and follow up on recommendations and commitments

- Regular, topical experts' engagements
- Establish cross-cutting thematic working groups that operate year-round
- Use outcomes to shape national and continental security discourse

15. A Vision for the Next Decade

- Institutional independence through a foundation model
- Strategic and diversified financing anchored on African ownership
- Digital transformation to reach broader audiences
- Concrete policy and implementation linkages with the African Union and Member States
- Meaningful and sustained stakeholder engagement on relevant, pertinent areas across sectors and generations.

16. Conclusion

Over the past decade, the Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa has established itself as a distinctive and trusted platform for frank, African-led dialogue on peace and security. It has succeeded in elevating African scholarship and voices, providing a safe and informal space for diverse actors to engage on critical issues, and enhancing visibility for African perspectives within continental and global debates. Its knowledge products, particularly the State of Peace and Security in Africa (SPSA) Report, along with pre- and post-Forum activities, have enriched discourse and created a foundation for long-term impact.

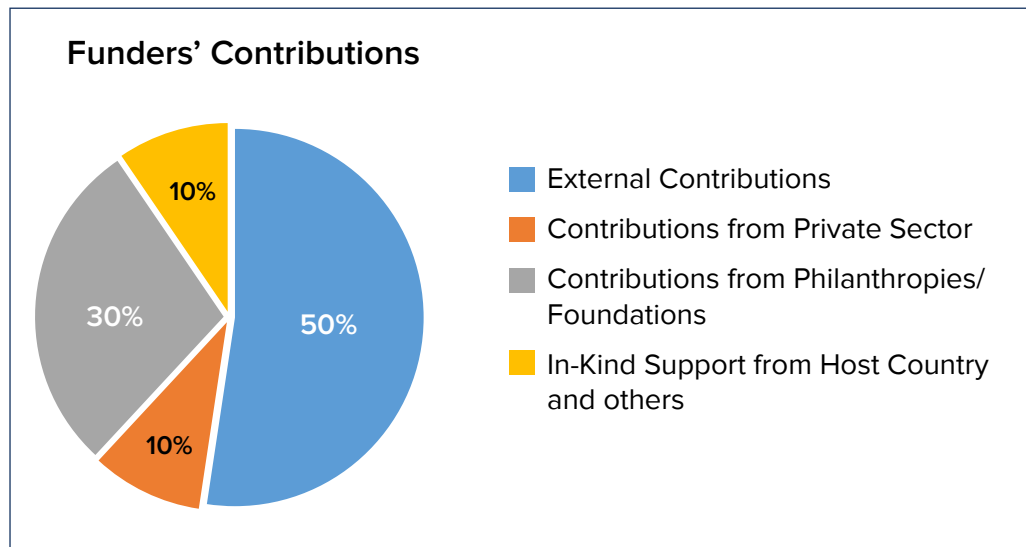
At the same time, the Forum's achievements are tempered by persistent institutional, structural, and political challenges. Limited independence, funding instability, gaps in institutional capacity, and the absence of systematic follow-up mechanisms have constrained its ability to fully realise its mandate and to translate dialogue into sustained policy influence. The long-standing aspiration to institutionalise Tana as an independent foundation remains unfulfilled — a missed opportunity that continues to limit its resilience and growth.

Looking forward, the Forum stands at a critical juncture. The next decade must be defined by bold reforms to safeguard its relevance and distinctiveness. Strategic

priorities include securing institutional independence, broadening financing beyond traditional donors, enhancing year-round engagement, and strengthening mechanisms for tracking influence and follow-up. Equally important is the need to maintain the Forum's informal and inclusive character while adapting to new realities, including digital engagement and geographic flexibility.

If these reforms are pursued with urgency and commitment, Tana can move beyond being a platform that primarily shapes discourse to one that also shapes action — bridging the gap between ideas and implementation. By reclaiming its founding spirit of boldness, independence, and African-led problem-solving, the Forum can continue to play a pivotal role in shaping Africa's peace and security landscape in its second decade and beyond.

Tana Budget Funding Contributions (2012-2023)



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