

[Final Draft] Theme Summary | 12th Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa 23 – 25 October 2026

PATHWAYS TO PEACE IN AFRICA: ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY AND GEOPOLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

BACKGROUND

The metaphor *There are multiple routes to the market* provides a distinctly African epistemological frame for re-imagining peace as a dynamic, multidimensional destination accessible through diverse pathways. The *market* functions as a metaphor for peace: a condition that encompasses spatial, temporal, physical, and psychological dimensions. The organisation and spatial logic of traditional African markets show that access rarely follows a single route. If peace is the destination, this metaphor suggests the continent offers multiple pathways to sustainable peace. The *market* also serves as a metaphor for a place where insights, methods, experience, and solutions from Africa's peace and security stakeholders intersect through frank, relevant, and candid dialogue.

The 12th edition of the Tana High-Level Forum foregrounds economic sovereignty and geopolitical transformation as interconnected routes toward sustainable peace. Africa's ability to govern resources, finance development, regulate digital transformation, strengthen institutions, and shape regional integration directly affects the continent's capacity to prevent conflict, build legitimacy, and pursue its own security priorities. These raise numerous geoeconomic and geopolitical questions that the 12th edition of the Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa seeks to address.

Economic sovereignty is the freedom and ability to exercise agency, legitimacy, and institutional autonomy within an interconnected global order. This raises questions about Africa's ability to define and pursue its own economic priorities, mobilise and govern its resources, shape the terms of its participation in the global economy, and protect the policy space required for inclusive development and durable peace. Deficiencies in these respects have had direct, traceable implications for peace and security.

Debates on economic sovereignty expose enduring constraints on Africa's ability to extract, process, trade, and leverage its resources for development. External control over value chains, limited policy autonomy, debt dependence, and structural dependence in global trade and finance reproduce historical patterns of exploitation. These dynamics are not only economic concerns; they also shape the structural drivers of conflict by affecting employment, state legitimacy, social welfare, resource competition, and governments' capacity to deliver public goods. The Forum should therefore treat economic policy and peace policy as mutually reinforcing fields rather than separate agendas.

Geopolitical transformation further complicates this landscape. As global power rivalries intensify, Africa faces opportunities for investment and security partnerships but also risks of fragmentation and new forms of dependency. Resource politics (historically central to conflict) now extend into the digital domain. Africa's digital transformation, while promising integration and innovation, is undermined by a persistent digital divide that reinforces inequalities and heightens the risk of conflict. At the same time, digital technologies reshape conflict dynamics through disinformation, cyber threats, and emerging forms of digital imperialism, even as they offer tools for peacebuilding and resilience.

These challenges place renewed emphasis on African institutions' role. Despite normative and operational advances, gaps in financing, coordination, and readiness persist. Strengthening institutional autonomy, sustainable security financing, and adaptive capacities is essential to navigate pressures from economic sovereignty and geopolitical shifts. Ultimately, Africa's pursuit of peace requires coherent

regional integration, effective management of informal and illicit economies, and resilient institutions capable of shaping a sovereign and peaceful continental order.

SUB-THEMES

Sub-Theme 1: Resource Wealth and Monetary Sovereignty for Industrial Development

Africa's strategic resources occupy a central place in global economic transformation and in the continent's aspirations for industrial development, peace, and sovereignty. Yet extractive economic structures, weak governance systems, illicit financial flows, opaque resource-backed financing, external control over pricing and settlement systems, and limited domestic value addition have often converted resource wealth into leakage, dependency, monetary and fiscal vulnerability, and conflict. Resource sovereignty must therefore be understood not only as ownership or control over natural assets, but as the capacity to govern the full financial and industrial circuit through which resource wealth is priced, financed, processed, traded, settled, and reinvested. This includes strengthening African control over pricing, invoicing, insurance, banking, settlement systems, credit creation, revenue management, and value chains so that strategic resources generate industrial capability, employment, public goods, and peacebuilding dividends.

Across the continent, state and non-state actors contest strategic resources, particularly where governance deficits, inequitable benefit-sharing, environmental degradation, geopolitical competition, and illicit extraction undermine legitimacy and stability. Although Africa remains a major supplier of critical minerals and other strategic resources to global markets, much of the value addition continues to take place outside the continent. At the same time, revenues are frequently diverted through external financial systems, debt service, or illicit channels. Export earnings often accumulate as foreign reserves or finance external obligations rather than expanding domestic credit, productive investment, and job creation. Reliance on third currencies for trade settlement further drains foreign exchange reserves and exposes the economy to external shocks. At the same time, a growing share of resource output is pre-committed through collateralised, opaque, resource-backed loans, exposing states to fiscal crises, austerity pressures, and social unrest.

Notably, Africa's youth must be positioned not merely as beneficiaries of resource wealth, but as central actors in transforming it into industrial capability and shared prosperity. Expanding youth access to technical skills, enterprise finance, decent work, and decision-making across mining, processing, manufacturing, and related value chains can help retain value on the continent, reduce exclusion and unemployment, and strengthen social stability. A sovereign resource and monetary agenda should therefore enable young Africans to innovate, build enterprises, and shape how Africa invests resource revenues in its productive future.

This sub-theme therefore asks how Africa can move beyond the ownership-extraction cycle toward a more sovereign model of strategic resource governance that links natural assets, monetary flows, industrialisation, and peace. Panellists will examine what resource sovereignty means in an increasingly competitive and unsettled global order; how African states can strengthen ownership, pricing, revenue management, payment, and settlement systems; and what roles governments, regional institutions, development banks, private sector actors, and communities should play in promoting equitable, transparent, and sustainable governance. The discussion will also explore how domestic value addition, transparent resource financing, regional cooperation, and reinvestment of revenues into productive sectors can strengthen fiscal resilience, reduce conflict risks, and consolidate peace. The ultimate objective is to generate practical policy recommendations for governing Africa's strategic resources and related monetary flows in ways that advance industrial development, promote peace and security, and strengthen sovereignty.

Sub-Theme 2: Leveraging African Institutions and Capabilities at the Intersection of Peace and Macroeconomic Governance

Africa's peace and security landscape is increasingly shaped by transformations in the global geopolitical order, growing demands for economic sovereignty, and renewed questions about the autonomy,

legitimacy, and effectiveness of African institutions. Institutional weaknesses should therefore be understood not only as conventional capacity deficits but also as financial dependence, donor-driven priorities, limited policy space, epistemic dependence, operational constraints, and the weakening of state sovereignty. As African states, the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, and related continental and regional bodies seek to strengthen autonomy and collective agency, the relationship between macroeconomic governance, institutional capability, and peace and security becomes central to the continent's ability to prevent conflict, build legitimacy, and pursue its own strategic priorities.

African institutions have made important advances in conflict prevention, mediation, peace support operations, crisis response, and the development of normative governance frameworks. Yet persistent conflicts in the Sahel, Sudan, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and parts of the Horn of Africa continue to reveal financial, epistemic, institutional, and operational constraints. Many interventions remain heavily dependent on external financing, technical assistance, logistical support, and externally shaped priorities, raising questions about ownership, sustainability, institutional autonomy, and the ability of African institutions to define and finance their own peace and security agendas. Global power competition, evolving security partnerships, and increased engagement from emerging powers sharpen these concerns, creating opportunities for investment, infrastructure, and cooperation but also fragmenting regional approaches, intensifying rivalries, and generating new forms of dependency.

Transformation within this theme's reality today also requires an approach that holistically links sovereignty and agency with inclusion and peace in the digital space. As a result, the link between peace and macroeconomic governance in the modern world will be incomplete, and proverbially half-baked, if digital transformation is understood only as access or technological modernisation. Data, digital infrastructure, algorithms, platforms, cloud systems, payment technologies, and artificial intelligence have become new resource frontiers requiring sovereignty, governance, and accountability. Africa's digital transformation should therefore be understood not only as a matter of access or technological modernisation, but as a question of agency, inclusion, fair value distribution, and peace. Over the past decade, digitalisation and information and communication technologies have become central to Africa's socio-political and economic transformation. Continental policy institutions, including the African Union, have consequently positioned science, technology, and innovation as pillars of development, as reflected in the Africa Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030), which seeks to build an integrated and inclusive digital society and economy, promote continental ownership of digital tools, diversify economies, and support regional integration through initiatives such as the Digital Single Market linked to the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Yet Africa must think beyond access. Digital subservience is not limited to exclusion from connectivity or utility; it also concerns who authors, owns, governs, and benefits from data, infrastructure, platforms, algorithms, cloud systems, payment technologies, and global digital rules. Externally controlled technologies may reproduce patterns of dependency by embedding African economies within systems governed by external actors. Contemporary digital imperialism operates less through territorial conquest than through control over data ecosystems, communication networks, digital markets, and technological standards that shape economic, social, and political life. Africa must therefore move beyond tokenistic inclusion by strengthening local and continental authorship and ownership of technologies; building capabilities in data governance, regulation, computing infrastructure, research and development, Artificial Intelligence (AI), skills, and innovation; and participating more effectively in global digital rulemaking. Furthermore, externally controlled technologies can deepen strategic dependency, reproduce (digital) imperialism, limit African policy space and restrict fair value capture, despite the continent's role in supplying critical minerals. Inclusion is also incomplete unless women, youth, platform workers, informal workers, and disadvantaged groups can shape and benefit from the digital economy, as weak macroeconomic governance may, in the long run, intensify threats, disinformation, algorithmic bias, and technology-mediated instability.

Furthermore, African institutions should embed intergenerational solidarity in their governance through meaningful co-leadership, shared decision-making, and sustained knowledge exchange between established and emerging leaders. By jointly exploring institutional, financial, technological, and policy mechanisms, generations can combine experience, innovation, and diverse expertise to maximise Africa's capabilities at the intersection of peace and macroeconomic governance. This approach can strengthen institutional legitimacy, continuity, adaptability, and collective African agency.

This sub-theme will examine practical pathways for building capable, resilient, self-reliant, and knowledge-producing institutions that can reduce dependence on external actors, strengthen African ownership of the peace and security agenda, and contribute to a more peaceful sovereign continent, while ensuring that the digital options and explorations do not generate new (forms of) dependency, exclusion, and insecurity.

These explorations may include, but are not limited to, how to expand digital transformation and inclusion while strengthening meaningful agency over strategic digital resources, including data, infrastructure, platforms, cloud systems, algorithms and payment technologies; what capabilities to prioritise to enhance Africa's position and positionality; promoting digital markets without creating vulnerabilities and exclusionary structures; constructive engagement within the global technology space without weakening domestic, continental capabilities; and the contribution of digital technologies and AI to peacebuilding, among others.

Sub-Theme 3: Untapped Leverage, Unnoticed Movements: Regional Integration and Illicit Economies

Regional integration is as much a trade agenda as it is a peace and resilience agenda. The African Union conceptualises regional integration as a process through which states within a shared geographic space deepen economic, political, and socio-cultural cooperation. Such cooperation aims to reduce trade barriers, promote political stability, facilitate mobility, and strengthen African states' collective influence in the international system. In a global context characterised by economic interdependence and intensified international trade, regional integration has become a central driver of development, competitiveness, and resilience. For Africa, it matters especially because many national markets are relatively small and there is a need to expand intra-African trade and economic exchange. Through the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people, regional integration can stimulate growth, competitiveness, and collective resilience. This agenda links to Regional Economic Communities as foundational pillars of integration and aligns with the UN 2030 Agenda and the African Union's Agenda 2063. The establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area in 2018 therefore represents a major institutional milestone in the pursuit of a prosperous, integrated, and peaceful Africa.

However, any analysis of regional integration in Africa must also account for the scale and significance of informal economic activity. The informal sector accounts for a substantial share of employment and contributes significantly to gross domestic product across the continent. Much of Africa's economic activity, employment, and cross-border exchange occurs outside formal regulatory frameworks. Informality may therefore be understood as bottom-up integration driven by economic actors rather than regional institutions alone. By expanding livelihood opportunities, income generation, and market access for vulnerable populations, informal cross-border trade can help reduce socio-economic tensions and strengthen cohesion among border communities. At the same time, operating outside formal regulatory systems raises important questions for state authority, economic sovereignty, taxation, labour protection, customs management, and policy planning.

It is therefore important to distinguish analytically between informal and illicit economies. While the informal economy often provides livelihoods through lawful but unregistered or weakly regulated activities, illicit economies involve activities that are prohibited by law or conducted in violation of existing regulations. These may include smuggling, trafficking in natural resources, illicit arms flow, drug trafficking, trade mis-invoicing, capital flight, and the illegal exploitation of mineral and forest resources. In contexts where cross-border spaces are characterised by limited state presence and weak regulatory capacity, illicit economies can finance armed groups, enable weapons acquisition, strengthen trafficking networks, undermine governance, and weaken peacebuilding efforts. Furthermore, young people's cross-border mobility represents an under-recognised driver of regional integration, enabling trade, skills exchange, innovation, and the formation of social and economic networks across Africa. Yet unresolved drivers of migration (including unemployment, exclusion, insecurity, and weak mobility governance) can expose young people to exploitation, trafficking, recruitment into illicit economies, and incentives to participate in violence. Harnessing this untapped leverage therefore requires safer mobility pathways, stronger protection and livelihood systems, and regional cooperation that channels youth movement towards integration, shared prosperity, and peace.

The success of regional integration therefore depends not only on expanding formal markets and facilitating mobility, but also on developing policies that support gradual formalisation, protect livelihoods and vulnerable demographics, strengthen customs and financial oversight, and combat illicit economic networks that threaten stability and development. Ultimately, this sub-theme will examine regional integration not only as a trade agenda, but also as a peace, sovereignty, and resilience agenda.

A NOTE ON HISTORICIZATION

Historical lessons that can help enhance the discourse at the upcoming 12th edition of the Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa are highly welcome. However, historical enquiries regarding the above sub-themes should not be constrained to frames, lenses, and queries that draw their reference points from the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the colonial, or the post-colonial era. Africa had sovereign, independent entities and underwent various forms of transformation long before then, even if conceptualised differently from the Westphalian and post-colonial models. Thus, interrogating how sovereignty and transformations in the era preceding the Westphalian context and the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonial, or post-colonial era warrant their place in such a conversation as that to be held at the 12th edition of the Tana High-Level Forum on security in Africa.

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