



Where are African solutions to Africa problems?

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Abstract: The African Union has been criticised for not doing enough to help the continent overcome its many crises. Why do African leaders still run to the West for help and could the Union do more to fulfil its mandate of finding African solutions to African problems?

Since taking over as Kenya's [fifth President](#) in 2022, William Samoei Ruto has been on a relentless mission of pursuing the interests of the African continent abroad. Indeed, international relations scholars believe that the push for Africa's agenda globally places President Ruto in a position to be the [continental spokesperson](#). Other African leaders who advocated pan-Africanism include Thomas Sankara, Muammar Gaddafi, Malcom X, Kwame Nkrumah, and Patrice Lumumba, among others. In the echoes of the founding fathers of the Organisation of the African Union (OAU), predecessor to the African Union (AU), Ruto has ramped up the dire need for '[African solutions to African problems](#)'. The concept refers to the idea that African countries should take the lead in resolving the challenges they face, rather than relying on external interventions. The phrase is used to emphasise the importance of African agency, self-determination, and ownership in addressing the continent's various issues. That said, it is important to note that 'African solutions to African problems' is not a specific policy or programme but rather a general principle or

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approach. Its implementation and effectiveness vary depending on the specific context and the actions taken by African governments, regional organisations, and other stakeholders. The AU and sub-regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States ([ECOWAS](#)), the East African Community ([EAC](#)), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa ([COMESA](#)), and the Arab Maghreb Union ([AMU](#)), among others, have been actively involved in promoting African-led initiatives and mechanisms for conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and development. They have been working towards enhancing intra-African cooperation, fostering dialogue, and providing platforms for African countries to collaborate and address common challenges. Still, the AU is the apex of continental integration.

History of the AU

A continental organisation composed of 55 African countries, the [AU](#) succeeded the OAU, which was founded in 1963, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The OAU's primary goal was to foster solidarity among African nations, support decolonisation and combat apartheid in South Africa. It focused on coordinating African states' efforts to promote peace and stability, as well as supporting the liberation movements in colonised territories. As the years passed, it became apparent that the OAU needed to evolve and address broader issues, including economic development, regional integration, and political cooperation. As a result, the decision to establish the African Union was made.

In 1999, at the OAU's 36th Ordinary Session in Durban, South Africa, leaders adopted the [Sirte Declaration](#), which outlined the framework for the establishment of the African Union, officially launched in 2001, in Durban, replacing the OAU. Its founding document, known as the [Constitutive Act](#) of the African Union states key objectives which include promoting peace, security, and stability in Africa, accelerating economic and social development, fostering unity and solidarity among African states, and defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states. The AU has several key institutions, including the [Assembly](#) of the African Union (the highest decision-making body), the Executive Council (composed of foreign ministers), the [Pan-African Parliament](#), the [African Court](#) on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the African [Commission](#) on Human and Peoples' Rights.

AU successes

One of the AU's primary focuses is addressing AU's conflicts and promoting peace and security on the continent. It established the [Peace and Security Council](#) (PSC) which has played a crucial role in resolving conflicts and maintaining peace in various regions of Africa. One of its significant achievements is the deployment of peacekeeping missions in conflict zones, such as the African Union [Mission in Somalia](#) (AMISOM), which has been working to combat Al-Shabaab and stabilise the country. Also, the AU has been actively involved in mediating and negotiating peace

agreements between warring parties. For instance, in 2005, the AU helped broker the [Comprehensive Peace Agreement](#) that ended the Second Sudanese Civil War, leading to the eventual independence of South Sudan in 2011. The AU has taken a stand against unconstitutional changes of government in member states, including suspension of countries such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Sudan, where coups or attempts to undermine democratic processes have occurred, sending a clear message about the importance of upholding democratic principles.

Moreover, the AU has demonstrated its capacity to coordinate responses to health crises. During the 2014-2016 [Ebola outbreak](#) in West Africa, the AU provided support to affected countries, mobilised resources, and coordinated regional efforts to contain the disease. This was also evident when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out.

In 2013, the AU launched [Agenda 2063](#), a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of Africa over the next 50 years. The agenda aims to achieve a prosperous, integrated, and united Africa. Through this, the AU has initiated projects to enhance connectivity and infrastructure across the continent. Notably, the AU launched the [Program for Infrastructure Development](#) in Africa to improve transportation, energy, and communication networks, fostering economic growth and regional integration. In 2018, the AU launched the [African Continental Free Trade Area](#) (AfCFTA), aimed at creating a single market for goods and services across the continent. By facilitating intra-African trade, the AfCFTA is expected to boost economic growth and create new opportunities for businesses and consumers. Another AU achievement has been the active promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. It adopted the [African Union Gender Policy](#) in 2010 and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa ([Maputo Protocol](#)), setting out strategies for addressing African women rights, increasing their participation in decision-making and addressing gender-based violence.

AU challenges

While the AU has achieved the aforementioned significant successes, it has also faced challenges and experienced failures in some areas. It is criticised for its inability to end prolonged conflicts. Despite the AU's efforts in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, some conflicts on the continent have persisted for extended periods. Those in [South Sudan](#), [Libya](#), and the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), among others, have been difficult to resolve fully, exposing the limitations of the AU's peacekeeping capabilities which have also been criticised for their limited capacity and resources, affecting their ability to effectively respond to complex and large-scale conflicts. This has sometimes led to delays in mission deployment and challenges in adequately protecting civilians, raising serious human rights concerns. Other challenges include overdependence on [external funding](#), which limits the organisation's autonomy and ability to implement programmes aligned with the continent's specific needs and priorities. There are also implementation gaps. While

the AU has developed several ambitious frameworks and agendas, the gap between policy formulation and effective implementation remains a challenge. Some of its initiatives, such as Agenda 2063, have faced difficulties in translating visions into concrete actions on the ground. Furthermore, the AU's ability to enforce its decisions and resolutions in member states is limited. Unlike regional bodies such as the European Union, the AU lacks supranational authority, which hampers its ability to ensure compliance with agreed-upon measures. This is further exacerbated by bureaucratic inefficiencies and slow decision-making processes, which hinder its ability to respond promptly to emerging crises and issues. While the AfCFTA represents a significant step towards economic integration, obstacles such as non-tariff barriers, infrastructure gaps, and differing regulatory frameworks hinder the fulfilment of its potential.

Looking ahead

To fully realise 'African solutions to African problems', the AU needs to address these shortcomings through sustained efforts, pooling resources, knowledge and expertise, and investing in preventive diplomacy to address potential conflicts before they escalate. Other possible solutions involve building institutional capacity, including administrative structures and resources, addressing implementation gaps, and increasing cooperation among member states. Another key area to focus on is technology and innovation. African states, led by the AU, should invest in research development to drive innovation in various sectors. This goes together with promoting digital literacy and access to technology for all populations to enable tech inclusion in this digital age. They should be able to harness technology for improving healthcare, agriculture, and education. Addressing these problems also requires political will and improved coordination. It is also worth noting that international partnerships and collaborations still play a role in supporting African countries' efforts. It is good that the [AU acknowledges](#) some of these weaknesses and continues to work towards improving its capacity and effectiveness in addressing the continent's pressing issues.