

Sixth International Conference

Rethinking African Sovereignties in a Fragmented and Uncertain World

Cotonou, 8–11 May 2025

Summary of Discussions and Recommendations

Like many other terms in the vocabulary of politics, *sovereignty* and *sovereigntism* have become the subject of frequent and shifting interpretations, varying across countries and historical periods. Their widespread use conceals numerous ambiguities that the Conference sought, first and foremost, to clarify.

By examining these distortions and drawing on Africa's historical experience, participants endeavoured to identify the essential components of a **balanced and realistic conception of sovereignty** and to formulate recommendations for the future.

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Session 1

(Re)Building a Balanced and Realistic Sovereignty in African Domestic Governance

A. The Misappropriation of Political Concepts Related to Democracy

The concept of sovereignty commands exceptionally strong public support across Africa. It has mobilized mass demonstrations, contributed to political change, and, in many countries,

continues to resonate deeply with public opinion. As such, it deserves to be recognised as a legitimate aspiration. Yet it is only one expression of a much broader popular demand for political, economic and social change.

1. Deep and Widespread Public Frustration

For many years, African societies have experienced growing frustration, rooted in both domestic and external factors.

Domestic factors include:

- rapid population growth coupled with a lack of employment opportunities for young people;
- accelerating urbanization accompanied by increasing poverty on the outskirts of major cities;
- broader access to information, enabling citizens to compare their living conditions with those elsewhere in the world;
- growing disillusionment with poor governance, endemic corruption and widening social inequalities.

External factors include:

- persistent insecurity and the inability of governments to protect their populations against terrorism, leaving many citizens feeling abandoned by the State;
- France's disappointing record in the region, combined with a communication strategy widely perceived as arrogant and paternalistic;
- the perceived inability of the regional organization (ECOWAS) to respond to the aspirations of the populations concerned.

Fueled by anti-colonial and anti-establishment rhetoric, and in the absence of credible political alternatives, this widespread resentment created favorable conditions for military takeovers. By appropriating popular demands—particularly the demand for sovereignty—military leaders were able to overthrow existing governments, consolidate their hold on power and construct a sovereigntist narrative that initially enjoyed significant popular support.

It soon became apparent, however, that the new rulers differed little from those they had replaced. The same patterns of predation persisted, although sometimes in different forms. One elite merely displaced another. Many of the new leaders had themselves been part of the previous system and quickly reverted to familiar practices, adding an even stronger authoritarian and dictatorial dimension.

For these reasons, and because of their continuing inability to contain jihadist violence, these regimes may ultimately prove as vulnerable as their predecessors. Their hold on power is becoming increasingly fragile.

2. A Distorted Conception of Sovereignty Reduced to Political Rhetoric

The contemporary sovereigntist discourse first emerged in Bangui before spreading rapidly across the region, where it has been repeatedly invoked—particularly by the leaders of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

This discourse revolves around the promise of restoring a supposedly lost independence. It draws heavily on themes such as foreign interference, neo-colonialism and imperialist aggression, all of which are vigorously denounced and portrayed as omnipresent in the statements and actions of Western governments. It combines references to the heroic figures of Africa's anti-colonial struggles with grandiloquent rhetoric and sweeping promises of

renewed prosperity, abundant employment opportunities for young people and a brighter future.

Although the aspiration to sovereignty is entirely legitimate, the political narrative built around it has often proved illusory. Initially persuasive, it rapidly loses credibility because it bears little relation to the daily realities experienced by ordinary citizens.

The contrast between rhetoric and reality is striking.

Governments proclaim sovereignty as a defining national objective, yet:

- living conditions continue to deteriorate, with soaring prices and shortages of essential goods and services;
- economic activity remains depressed, unemployment continues to rise and the promised opportunities for young people fail to materialise;
- insecurity worsens, governments control an ever smaller share of their national territory and increasingly fail to provide basic public services;
- foreign military actors associated with former colonial powers may have departed, only to be replaced by others that are often less constrained by concerns for human rights while imposing considerable financial costs;
- former foreign "exploiters" are denounced, yet national natural resources are transferred to new external partners under equally advantageous conditions;
- alleged threats to national sovereignty are frequently invoked to justify political repression, purges, arbitrary arrests and, in some cases, summary executions.

3. Political Vocabulary Deprived of Its Meaning

The distortion of political language did not begin with the recent resurgence of sovereigntist rhetoric. It had already become a defining feature of many political systems during the preceding decades. Much of the language used by those in power has gradually become disconnected from the realities it claims to describe.

Examples abound:

- **Elections** often lack credibility. Electoral fraud, ballot stuffing, the exclusion of serious opponents on procedural grounds, vote-buying and other irregularities have too frequently transformed elections into mechanisms for legitimising the capture of state power rather than expressing the genuine will of the people.
- **Political parties** are frequently little more than personal vehicles built around a single leader. Lacking coherent programmes or long-term strategies, they exist primarily to gain or retain power. In many cases, they also reflect ethnic loyalties more than ideological convictions.
- **Constitutions**, although presented as inviolable foundations of the State, are readily amended whenever they become obstacles to the continued exercise of power.
- **Supreme Courts** too often function as instruments for endorsing executive decisions rather than as independent guardians of constitutional order.
- **The judiciary** frequently applies justice unevenly—harshly toward ordinary citizens while showing remarkable leniency toward political elites, except when legal proceedings serve to eliminate political rivals.
- **Local authorities** generally exercise little genuine authority, as political power and public resources remain overwhelmingly concentrated at the centre.
- **Public administration** is too often characterised by corruption at every level, where access to services depends less on citizens' rights than on informal payments.

- **Freedom of expression** remains severely constrained whenever criticism targets those in power. In some contexts, dissent is merely discouraged; in others, it is actively repressed.
- **The separation of powers**, while formally enshrined in constitutional texts, often remains largely theoretical.

As a consequence, the very concepts that underpin democracy have gradually lost their substantive meaning. Political vocabulary has become detached from lived reality, creating widespread public distrust. Citizens increasingly reject not only the abuses committed in the name of democracy but, regrettably, democracy itself.

Words such as democracy, justice, rule of law, elections and political parties have thus become associated with experiences far removed from their universally accepted meanings. Instead of fostering citizenship, they often contribute to public alienation and cynicism.

One of Africa's major political challenges is therefore to restore meaning to these concepts—to ensure that they genuinely reflect African realities and aspirations, and that citizens once again recognise themselves in the institutions and values they are intended to represent.

B. "The Assertion of African Sovereignty Is Not a Recent Phenomenon"

1. Historical Examples

One of the Conference's senior participants recalled several historical episodes demonstrating that African leaders have long been capable of defending their countries' sovereign interests.

During the Biafran War, France sought permission to use Cameroon as a base for military air operations in support of the secessionist movement. President Ahmadou Ahidjo refused, forcing France to conduct its air operations from Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire instead.

As the speaker observed:

"This illustrates what African countries are capable of achieving when they are determined to defend their own interests."

Another example concerned French nuclear testing in the Sahara. Concerned about the risk of radioactive contamination across the region, a group of African countries led by Nigeria formally appealed to President Charles de Gaulle to halt the tests. Their diplomatic initiative contributed to the eventual decision to end the programme.

As another participant noted:

"Diplomatic action has produced results before. Africa can succeed when it takes itself seriously."

The Conference also recalled that a small group of African thinkers and political leaders gathered around Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana helped lay the intellectual foundations for regional integration in West Africa, including the future Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its principle of the free movement of persons and goods.

2. Recognising the Mistakes of the Past

Participants nevertheless stressed that acknowledging Africa's past achievements should not prevent an honest assessment of earlier shortcomings.

One participant observed:

"Our initial weakness was a lack of preparation. At independence, too few young Africans had been adequately trained to assume the immense responsibilities before them. We cannot rely indefinitely on others. If we approach our own development seriously, we shall succeed."

Pedro Pires, the first President of Cabo Verde, expressed a similar view:

"What we accepted at independence was essentially political independence. We believed that international recognition and membership of the United Nations amounted to sovereignty. In reality, genuine sovereignty also requires political, economic, diplomatic, cultural, linguistic and social emancipation."

3. The Unfinished Question of Institutional Sovereignty

Perhaps the most fundamental weakness inherited from independence concerns the institutional organisation of African States.

Many newly independent governments relied heavily on French constitutional models, often reproducing them almost unchanged. This constitutional transplantation created highly centralised systems that concentrated extraordinary powers in the hands of presidents—systems that, in practice, often resembled elective monarchies more than republican democracies.

More broadly, the institutional architecture of many African States still reflects the logic of the colonial state, originally designed to organise the extraction of resources rather than to serve the interests of citizens.

Although the actors have changed over time, the underlying structures frequently remain intact. Former concessionary colonial companies may have disappeared, yet other external actors—including private military companies and mercenary groups—sometimes occupy comparable positions within new geopolitical configurations.

In such circumstances, invoking national sovereignty while allowing national wealth to be transferred abroad, manipulating an insufficiently informed youth and denying citizens a meaningful voice in determining their collective future cannot reasonably be regarded as genuine sovereignty.

C. The Evolution of Sovereignty in the Contemporary Context

National sovereignty is now facing profound challenges. Unlike in the 1960s, it can no longer be conceived as an absolute and impermeable principle that excludes all forms of external influence. Contemporary realities require a more nuanced understanding.

Several structural factors necessarily qualify the exercise of sovereignty:

- **Legally**, States voluntarily accept limitations through international treaties and agreements, such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) concluded with the European Union.
- **Economically**, many African countries remain heavily dependent on international financial institutions, external markets and foreign partners.
- **In the security sphere**, governments frequently rely—whether by choice or necessity—on external military support to confront threats such as terrorism and transnational organised crime.

Recognising these realities does not amount to abandoning sovereignty. Rather, it reflects the changing nature of Statehood in an increasingly interdependent world.

At the same time, participants warned against the instrumentalisation of sovereignty by regimes that have come to power through military coups. The sovereignty they proclaim often masks enduring military, economic and institutional dependencies.

Similarly, the rhetoric of a so-called "second independence" frequently serves to legitimise the emergence of new ruling elites whose methods may prove no less authoritarian or predatory than those they replaced. Anti-Western—and particularly anti-French—discourse often accompanies shifts in external alliances while providing justification for the indefinite postponement of democratic transitions.

In such circumstances, appeals to "national sovereignty" may become little more than political narratives concealing a deeper crisis of legitimacy, accountability and effective autonomy.

D. The Building Blocks of a Balanced Sovereignty

1. Democratic Legitimacy as the Foundation

The Conference emphasised that genuine sovereignty must first and foremost rest upon democratic legitimacy. However, democracy need not be conceived solely through institutional models inherited from Europe.

African political traditions themselves provide valuable sources of legitimacy that deserve careful consideration.

Traditional kingdoms, chiefdoms and customary authorities have long exercised recognised forms of political authority across many African societies. Their continued relevance in countries such as Nigeria and Uganda, as well as the recent recognition of traditional chiefdoms by legislation in Benin and Côte d'Ivoire, illustrates the possibility of combining democratic governance with indigenous institutional traditions.

The objective is not to idealise pre-colonial institutions, but to acknowledge that constitutional innovation in Africa should draw upon African historical experience rather than relying exclusively on imported institutional models.

2. Rethinking the African State

The modern State is itself a historical construction.

In Europe, it evolved over centuries through distinct historical trajectories and therefore assumed different institutional forms according to national circumstances. Following independence, African countries largely inherited this model without always adapting it sufficiently to their own political cultures, social realities and historical experiences.

Consequently, many citizens continue to perceive the State as an external structure rather than as an institution that genuinely embodies their collective aspirations.

The African Union rightly defines its member States as independent and sovereign. Yet this should not prevent institutional creativity. Sovereignty does not require constitutional imitation; rather, it calls for institutions that are firmly rooted in African realities while remaining fully consistent with democratic principles.

3. Bringing Government Closer to Citizens

Participants strongly emphasised that a more balanced sovereignty also requires a substantial strengthening of decentralisation.

Given the size, diversity and historical complexity of many African States, excessively centralised systems often struggle to respond effectively to local needs.

Although decentralisation has been promoted for decades, it has too often remained largely symbolic. Administrative responsibilities have sometimes been transferred without corresponding political authority or financial resources.

Effective decentralisation therefore requires genuine devolution of powers, accompanied by adequate financial means and meaningful local participation.

Such reforms inevitably reduce the concentration of political and economic power at the centre—a reality that may explain why decentralisation has often encountered resistance.

4. Sovereignty through Regional Co-construction

The Conference stressed that democratic legitimacy alone cannot guarantee genuine sovereignty unless it is accompanied by stronger regional integration.

Poverty, insecurity, climate change, migration and economic vulnerability transcend national borders. Most African countries face remarkably similar structural challenges that cannot be effectively addressed in isolation.

Regional integration should therefore not be viewed as a limitation of sovereignty but as one of its principal instruments.

This conception implies neither the abandonment nor the dilution of national sovereignty. Rather, sovereignty is strengthened through cooperation.

As participants observed:

Real sovereignty is not surrendered; it is co-constructed. Internally, it rests upon democratic legitimacy and inclusive institutions. Externally, it is strengthened through regional integration, enabling Africa to negotiate with the rest of the world from a position of greater equality.

Without such a conception of sovereignty, political independence risks remaining largely symbolic.

For this reason, several participants suggested that alongside the African Union's description of its member States as "independent and sovereign", the notion of interdependence should also be explicitly recognised.

E. Recommendations for Positive Change

1. The Characteristics of a Balanced and Realistic Sovereignty

a) Recognising Past Mistakes

The first requirement is intellectual honesty.

As one senior participant observed:

"We must update our understanding of both sovereignty and independence."

Africa, the international system and global power relations have all undergone profound transformation since independence. Accordingly, sovereignty must now be understood from multiple perspectives rather than through the conceptual frameworks inherited from the 1960s.

Recognising past mistakes is not an admission of failure; it is the necessary starting point for institutional renewal.

b) Restoring the Credibility of the State through Good Governance

A sovereign State must enjoy the confidence of its citizens.

Citizens should be able to believe that public institutions serve the common good rather than private interests; that public officials respect the rules they themselves establish; and that government acts fairly, transparently and in the long-term interests of society.

Legitimacy depends not only upon electoral processes but also upon exemplary leadership, accountability and effective checks and balances.

Institutions inspire confidence when they command respect rather than fear, and when public authority is exercised under the rule of law rather than through arbitrary power.

Ultimately, restoring citizens' trust in the State is one of the essential conditions for rebuilding genuine sovereignty.

b- Restoring the credibility of the State through “governance”

A fundamental question must be asked: who does the President actually serve? His population? Himself and his close circle? The military? Or another group?

Citizens must feel concerned by the conduct of public affairs. They must feel protected, taken into consideration — both as individuals and as families — today and in the foreseeable future. They must feel integrated into an institutional framework that they understand, in which they recognize themselves, to which they adhere, and for which they are willing to make efforts, even to make sacrifices.

The ruling elites must appear legitimate in their eyes and must honour the commitments they have made and the expectations placed upon them. They must project an image that commands respect, not fear, and even less contempt.

This is what it truly means to “inhabit” institutions: those who govern must respect them and accept that they are bound by them. The true source of exemplary leadership lies here: in the existence of checks and balances capable of sanctioning abuses and failures, and in an environment that encourages compliance with rules — far more reliably than the illusory search for a “Just Leader” or a devoted “Hero”.

Conversely, poor political example-making inevitably fuels frustration and contestation.

Respecting the commitments and rules established by society is what creates citizens' adherence and is the first value that must be transmitted to younger generations. When a Head of State disregards or manipulates these rules, there is a fundamental problem.

c- Restoring the “credibility of political discourse”

Political words must become more closely aligned with reality.

The concept of an “ECOWAS of peoples”, for example, must be translated into concrete action, with a clear explanation of “this is how we are going to achieve it.” We speak of the “free movement of goods and people”, yet the cost of air travel makes it impossible for many young Africans to move from one country to another. This is without even mentioning populist promises that are never followed by concrete results.

The drawers of administrations are full of unrealised projects. This creates inconsistency and young people no longer believe in political commitments. Feasibility matters. If citizens' support and participation are expected, they must be able to see themselves in these projects and believe that they can actually become reality.

d- Establishing strong, enlightened and — if possible — virtuous leadership

Barack Obama once said: “We need strong institutions, not strong men.”

What strengthens virtue is not the personality of a leader alone, but an environment of rules, controls and sanctions — a system in which citizens and leaders alike understand that they

have everything to gain by respecting the rules and everything to lose by violating them. This environment is the rule of law.

We certainly also need people of integrity who can serve as role models for younger generations. Unfortunately, they are not numerous today, at a time when personal enrichment has become, for many, the sole measure of success and the primary objective.

That said, the person at the top does matter. But it is the entire ruling elite that ultimately determines the direction of a country. A single individual is quickly overwhelmed by pressures and may eventually give in, disappear or be replaced.

e- Engaging youth in a path of realism, responsibility and hope

Today's youth represent a potential time bomb. They are often insufficiently equipped intellectually and ethically. Without strong reference points, young people become vulnerable to manipulation, and opportunists can lead them wherever they want through simplistic slogans such as: "Remove everyone," or "We need sovereignty!" — empty slogans when they are not backed by concrete content.

Africa possesses around 40% of the world's natural resources and has the youngest population on the planet: approximately one billion young people out of 1.3 billion Africans. Yet this demographic reality remains a challenge rather than an asset, because we have not yet learned how to transform it into a driving force.

We do not know how to properly engage this youth, which should be the engine of our freedom and independence. We must speak to them. Meanwhile, populism — which is currently causing considerable damage in many of our countries — has succeeded in reaching them.

The entire model must change. We must restore meaning to political concepts and examine what words such as democracy, elections and sovereignty actually mean in practice. Too often, they have become empty appearances rather than genuine realities.

Africa must rebuild a sovereignty that is both reasonable and adapted to today's world. The continent as a whole must develop a shared understanding of what sovereignty means.

f- Making young people protagonists of this "just and contemporary vision" of sovereignty

The aggressive and defensive conception of sovereignty that dominates current political discourse needs to be challenged and deconstructed. For this, it may be preferable to rely on time and to undertake this work ourselves, without external interference.

Let us establish constructive relations at the regional level. Let us find the appropriate mechanisms: populations suffer from regional tensions, but these problems are primarily created by political choices. We must work together.

The principle of sovereignty itself is not the real issue. The real questions are rather:

- How can we establish the "**stability pacts**" necessary for economic development and regional integration?
- How can we move towards **genuine democracies**, based on freedom of expression, stronger checks and balances, transparency and real government accountability? (See "*How to strengthen the effectiveness of the State in Africa*", recommendations available on www.initiative-afrique.org.)
- How can we establish genuine "**pacts with youth**", involving consultation, realism and follow-up mechanisms, so that young people become true protagonists of sovereignty and are able to resist manipulation?

(See “*African Youth: a time bomb or a historic opportunity?*”, recommendations available on www.initiative-afrique.org.)

g- A sovereignty built through cooperation with other African countries

It is no longer possible, as in the case of the AES, to cling rigidly to an absolute conception of national sovereignty. Should these countries be left to face their difficulties alone, or should they instead be accompanied in the name of the principle of solidarity among African countries?

No country in the sub-region enjoys absolute sovereignty. Complete isolation is impossible. Each nation must of course retain the ability to determine its own destiny, but it must also understand that the interests of its people — particularly in economic and security matters — will be better defended through cooperation and solidarity with other African countries.

Within the African Union itself, there is a need to redefine our terminology. We have tended to transform national sovereignty into an absolute dogma, which is unrealistic because all countries are interdependent. This interdependence requires, beyond sovereignty, a principle of solidarity.

This solidarity must be balanced. It cannot be confused with the approach promoted by the AES, which represents a narrow form of sovereignty — a nationalist withdrawal primarily designed to preserve political power.

SESSION 2

THE CONDITIONS FOR ACHIEVING AFRICA’S “ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY”

“The economy is the mother of all our battles.”

Economic sovereignty has become a strategic imperative. Africa must address its main current weaknesses and formulate practical recommendations so that it can become the economic power commensurate with the size and potential of its population.

A — THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE END OF THE WELFARE STATE MODEL

1 — Economic sovereignty has become a strategic priority for the continent

The welfare state model — a State that provided employment, relied heavily on subsidies, and financed imports through public debt — no longer works.

Moreover, this model benefited only a limited segment of the population: the so-called formal sector, which for many years was able to provide support and protection beyond itself. Those times are now over.

The debate generally focuses on the management of natural resources, the debt burden, neo-colonialism, imperialism, or the CFA franc in French-speaking Africa. This analysis is incomplete because it identifies symptoms rather than the root causes of the problem.

It places Africans in a victim position, leaving them with limited room for action beyond complaint and demands, while ultimately reinforcing dependency relationships.

Africa must move beyond this posture and understand that economic sovereignty primarily means mastering value chains: controlling the different stages of production, not only extracting resources, but also transforming them and marketing them under African-controlled conditions.

For a long time, this issue remained largely confined to political discourse. It has now returned to the forefront because of the resurgence of Pan-African ideas, the emergence of social networks, the arrival of a large unemployed youth population in public debates, and the collective aspiration of African populations for greater self-determination.

Failure to address these issues risks creating fertile ground for radicalised movements.

Becoming an economic power has therefore become a strategic necessity.

2 — Co-building sovereignty with the private sector

Reducing sovereignty to security, institutions, or rejection of foreigners will not maintain popular support for long — especially among young people, who far outnumber older generations.

Young Africans want jobs. They want to eat, build a future, and pursue their own African dream. Everything else comes afterwards.

Youth unemployment must therefore be considered a national security challenge.

There can be no sovereignty or security without employment; and there can be no employment without businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises, industrialisation, and policies aimed at replacing unnecessary imports with local production.

But do we have enough political will and courage to change our economic model, genuinely create economic sovereignty, and finance this transformation?

To build an economy, the private sector must be given the means to lead its own struggle for development.

3 — African companies are not sufficiently competitive

This question must be addressed seriously.

Africa imports around 80% of its consumer goods, while it must simultaneously create millions of jobs. This requires, as every successful economy in the world has done, a phase of industrialisation.

Yet 80% to 90% of today's youth do not possess skills adapted to labour market needs.

Furthermore, there is insufficient willingness to invest in reducing the prohibitive cost of electricity. Energy prices range between €0.45 and €0.70 per kWh in Africa, compared with approximately €0.10 to €0.20 in European countries.

This is compounded by difficulties relating to logistics, infrastructure, technology, skilled labour, supply chains and long-term financing.

Some African countries have successfully implemented free trade zones. However, the companies operating there generally do not produce for local consumption because domestic markets remain heavily taxed.

4 — The State as an “orchestrator” in the search for competitiveness

The State must play the role of orchestrator: it must coordinate this search for competitiveness and provide the private sector with the conditions required to become stronger.

National markets are often too small. However, within the framework of the AfCFTA, Africa represents a market where consumption exceeds \$2.5 trillion, while African companies currently capture no more than 15% of this turnover.

Africa must become competitive in a globalised market: producing at lower cost both for domestic consumption and for export.

This requires:

- favourable fiscal frameworks;
- appropriate infrastructure;
- strategic public policies.

If the necessary conditions are created, African private investors will respond.

When African savers find strong companies capable of creating jobs, generating value and producing competitive manufactured goods, they will invest in their own economies — and the rest will follow.

But this requires policies that support the private sector and, above all, stop obstructing it.

Under current conditions, however, the AfCFTA risks becoming merely a vast consumer market — an open highway for imported goods.

This also implies a necessary phase of intelligent protectionism, temporarily protecting emerging industries until they become competitive.

The State will have to play a major role in this permanent search for competitiveness (see the GIAF conference recommendations, “How to strengthen the effectiveness of the State in Africa”, available on www.initiative-afrique.org), even though this will inevitably challenge the prevailing practices of predation and rent-seeking.

B — ADDRESSING CURRENT WEAKNESSES

1 — Establishing a dialogue between the public and private sectors

Investors and entrepreneurs do not necessarily identify with the word “sovereignty”. Their priority is often more pragmatic: to “adapt”, to understand how others succeed, and to recognise that many African countries are not currently attractive to major international companies.

In many countries, there is also a lack of dialogue between the private sector and public authorities (with perhaps Morocco being a notable exception).

Yet building economic sovereignty requires precisely this dialogue: the State must create the conditions for development, while entrepreneurs and companies must become key actors in achieving it.

2 — Addressing the issue of energy costs

Without reliable and affordable access to energy, there can be no value chains.

a- A disappointing historical record

Numerous plans have existed since the creation of the African Union.

Even before independence, the Owen Falls Dam on the Nile in Uganda supplied the country and, for a long time, provided a significant share of Kenya's electricity needs — until demand eventually exceeded capacity.

Ghana developed the Akosombo Dam. Yet many other major projects failed to materialise, often because financing could not be secured, and electricity shortages have remained a major obstacle.

Energy is once again at the centre of attention. The slogan has become: "Africa must be electrified!"

The issue has been discussed repeatedly, yet the situation remains largely unchanged. Africa still lacks sufficient energy, despite the fact that these projects could transform the lives of hundreds of millions of people and are essential for industrialisation.

It should also be noted that international donors and African elites have often prioritised projects serving an externally oriented economy, while investments aimed at strengthening endogenous economic activity have been neglected.

According to President Ouattara, 80% of the population now has access to electricity. However, in Côte d'Ivoire, although electricity lines can be seen almost everywhere, many villages still do not have actual access to electricity.

b- "Multi-energy": an appropriate concept for Africa

Africa possesses all the resources needed to generate electricity.

There is oil, solar energy, and also abundant gas reserves, which can now increasingly be liquefied locally. The priority is to accelerate access to energy for the 600 million Africans who still lack it.

Although gas is not entirely free from environmental concerns, it could provide Africa with the energy base required for its development over the coming decades. It is a question of economic survival.

The ecological criticism often directed at such choices must be put into perspective. Africa contributes less than 9% of global greenhouse gas emissions (and this share can still be reduced). Its forests also contribute significantly to carbon absorption, while countries such as Germany are returning to coal, and China and the United States remain among the world's largest emitters.

Nuclear energy is among the least polluting sources of electricity — even compared with solar energy. It does not depend on sunshine or rainfall and has benefited from major technological advances, particularly through small modular reactors (SMRs). These reactors can be manufactured in compact units, transported in standard containers, and their components can increasingly be recycled. Thorium-based technologies also offer potential opportunities, given the widespread availability of this resource.

Nuclear energy therefore deserves a place in Africa's future energy mix.

This requires training engineers, technicians, welders and specialised professionals. Ghana, for example, has already established institutions providing education in nuclear science and technology.

A regional approach is essential, with a division of responsibilities among countries willing to cooperate.

A large-scale generator can supply electricity to an entire city such as Ouagadougou. In Malaysia, reliable energy supplies have contributed notably to major advances in food preservation and education.

c- Energy sovereignty: a realistic objective — provided planning begins now

Energy sovereignty is an achievable objective, but only if planning starts immediately.

The fundamental question is: what economic model should this energy serve?

Energy is essential for growth. Without energy, there can be no secure access to water — a resource that is already becoming increasingly scarce. Energy is required both to transport water and to treat polluted water.

Without water, there can be no large-scale mining operations, industrial production or modern agriculture.

Africa's energy potential remains largely untapped, and the possible revenues are considerable. Current estimates suggest around \$115 billion annually, with the possibility of generating an additional \$150 billion.

This financial potential could help transform the current decision-making process, where emergency responses often compete with long-term planning.

If Africa does not plan today — despite the fact that energy systems require a 50-year perspective — it will be unable to meet the enormous energy needs generated by demographic growth by 2050.

Asian countries have understood the importance of such long-term planning.

A major challenge remains: corruption.

How can countries resist the temptation created by the enormous financial flows involved?

The amounts at stake represent decades of salaries for many public officials — a powerful incentive.

Hong Kong understood early on that public officials responsible for strategic projects needed to be adequately paid in order to reduce incentives for corruption. Similarly, in many oil-producing countries today, senior officials in charge of natural resources are among the highest-paid public servants, based on the assumption that appropriate remuneration reduces the temptation to misuse public resources.

Solutions can also be developed in Africa. The estimated CFAF 18 billion per year generated by these sectors represents sufficient resources to motivate and secure the entire chain of decision-making.

This requires:

- effective control mechanisms;
- transparency;
- severe sanctions for corruption.

3 — Uncertain and incompatible monetary agendas

There are currently three competing monetary agendas in West Africa.

a- The ECOWAS agenda: a weakened Eco project

Within ECOWAS, the future Eco currency project has already been significantly weakened.

Several English-speaking countries do not meet the required inflation criteria. Several states are either in open disagreement or experiencing tensions with regional institutions.

Fundamental questions remain unresolved:

- Should Guinea-Bissau have the same voting weight as Côte d'Ivoire within the Central Bank?

- Will the Eco become a **common currency** or a **single currency**?

The monetary agenda is therefore facing serious difficulties.

The launch date has repeatedly been postponed since 1983. Is 2027 a realistic deadline?

Furthermore, four factors are weakening the foundations of the WAEMU monetary system.

i) Rising debt levels

Debt has doubled over the past ten years.

The debt-to-GDP ratio, which stood at around 32% in 2015, has risen to approximately 60%, with major differences between countries.

It exceeds 100% in Senegal, where debt servicing absorbs around 52% of the national budget, and reaches approximately 74% in Togo.

Many countries survive by paying mainly interest rather than reducing the principal, which continuously increases the overall debt burden.

This poor debt management — including by those who claim to defend the CFA franc system — threatens exchange-rate stability and potentially the future existence of the currency itself.

ii) The independence of the Central Bank is being challenged

The independence of the Central Bank has been weakened by sanctions imposed on Mali and Niger, which raised questions regarding this fundamental principle.

Article 4 states that the BCEAO cannot receive or accept instructions from any authority.

iii) The role of the French guarantee is questioned

France returned its currency reserves to the BCEAO but continues to guarantee the CFA franc's parity with the euro — without receiving any financial compensation in return.

France continues to act as an insurer without receiving an insurance premium.

Can this arrangement continue indefinitely?

The AES currency: myth or reality?

The creation of a currency within the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) remains uncertain.

However, three elements are likely to have a significant impact on the feasibility and consequences of such a project.

First, the narrative promoted by the Global South against the Western world has strong political appeal. Its influence should not be underestimated, nor should the possibility that countries of the Global South may provide support for an AES currency project.

Second, if the AES countries were to leave the WAEMU monetary system, the consequences would be considerable.

Together, they represent approximately 79% of WAEMU's territory and 51% of its population. Their departure would break territorial continuity: Benin and Togo would remain on one side, Senegal and Guinea on another, while Côte d'Ivoire would find itself increasingly isolated.

The entire principle of the free movement of people and goods would risk becoming largely theoretical.

Third, there could be a domino effect, particularly in Senegal, where young generations might increasingly question why they should remain within the CFA franc system.

Conclusions: towards a pragmatic approach to monetary sovereignty

The chronic overvaluation of the CFA franc encourages imports at the expense of exports and contributes to persistent trade deficits that cannot be sustained indefinitely.

The key question is therefore: how can action be taken?

The monetary issue must be addressed in a practical and non-dogmatic way.

As economist Philippe Hugon has suggested, currency policy lies at the intersection between confidence and sovereignty. Both dimensions must be taken into account.

Monetary sovereignty cannot be reduced to a political slogan; it must be assessed according to its capacity to support economic development, regional integration and the well-being of populations.

C — OTHER MAJOR OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 — A considerable potential exists through the creation of value chains, but important questions remain

Africa has enormous potential for value creation, but this requires a profound transformation of current economic models.

Take Chad as an example. The country is proud to have one of the largest cattle populations in Africa, yet livestock farmers remain poor and youth unemployment is extremely high.

A cow may be sold for CFAF 10,000 in N'Djamena and exported “on the hoof” to Nigeria, where its by-products — particularly the leather — are processed because Nigeria has developed tanning industries while Chad has not.

A pair of shoes manufactured in Italy from this leather can generate up to CFAF 2 million in value.

The lesson is clear: Africa must stop exporting raw materials and instead develop transformation capacities, build value chains and capture a larger share of the wealth generated by its resources.

The same question applies to agricultural land.

Africa possesses around 60% of the world’s arable land, theoretically providing the capacity to feed its own populations and contribute to global food security.

Yet estimates vary considerably: the FAO refers to around 60 million hectares of unused agricultural land, while other sources mention 100 or even 200 million hectares.

The essential question is not only the exact figure but also: how can this land be sustainably brought into productive use?

2 — “Dusting off” outdated frameworks

Many existing regulations are outdated. Some texts inherited from independence remain unchanged despite having become ineffective, or even harmful, reflecting a past (post-) colonial framework that no longer corresponds to current objectives.

For example, restrictions preventing companies from establishing themselves freely in other African countries contradict the ambition of regional economic integration.

Africa must innovate according to the new objectives it has set itself.

It must become more agile and develop new technical and environmental standards that can be shared by all countries, allowing the construction of a modern economic framework adapted to present challenges.

3 — Seven conditions for genuinely developing Africa's economy

1. Putting human resources at the centre of everything

The need for determined leaders capable of changing rules and eliminating harmful practices will become increasingly important.

However, the challenge concerns the entire population. Everyone must become part of this collective transformation.

The education system must ask itself a fundamental question:

How can we equip one billion young African minds so that they become productive citizens capable of contributing to development?

Although education has always been recognised as essential, African systems have focused too much on general education and not enough on professional skills and trades.

Some countries are beginning to change direction. Benin, for example, has made technical and vocational training a priority.

This type of training is demanded by the economy and by businesses themselves. Africa must innovate and draw inspiration from successful pragmatic experiences elsewhere.

Technical education has often failed because of outdated equipment, obsolete programmes and graduates who are poorly prepared for employment.

Training must increasingly be designed with and by those who will actually employ young people. Many small and medium-sized enterprises already contribute to professional training.

Young people must also be attracted towards these professions. The most effective communication will not come from campaigns, but from seeing successful new generations of skilled workers, technicians and artisans.

Innovation emerging from the grassroots level is one of the great engines of economic growth. It is not encouraged enough.

Digitalisation and African technological sovereignty

Africa must also accelerate digitalisation.

Artificial intelligence will either be developed according to Chinese models or Western models. It will not necessarily reflect African realities, cultures or ways of thinking.

If Africa wants an African artificial intelligence system — and therefore a form of technological sovereignty — it must work collectively.

This requires:

- training highly qualified specialists;
- creating institutions capable of mobilising major financial, human and energy resources;
- establishing broad international partnerships;
- developing coordinated programmes, including training abroad.

Such an ambition cannot realistically be achieved at the national level alone.

2 — Protecting emerging economies and economic actors

A certain level of intelligent protectionism is necessary.

Africa must recognise that building economic sovereignty is a long-term process:

“Economic sovereignty is acquired progressively.”

Emerging industries need time to become competitive. Temporary protection measures may therefore be justified, provided that they are part of a clear strategy aimed at strengthening companies rather than creating permanent dependence.

The objective is not isolation from global markets, but rather creating the conditions that allow African companies to compete effectively.

3 — Relying on “collective” economic sovereignty

No African country can succeed alone.

Africa must move together towards collective economic sovereignty, relying on regional institutions whose primary purpose is precisely to facilitate such cooperation.

This requires:

- a shared vision;
- mechanisms adapted to the realities of each country;
- economic partnerships based on mutual interests.

This approach is also directly linked to collective security, because poverty, exclusion and lack of opportunities generate frustration, instability and violence.

Historically, political unions and federations — such as Senegal and The Gambia, or Mali’s past federation experience — have not succeeded because they were primarily political projects.

The priority today should be a different approach: an economic integration process, built jointly with the private sector and based on concrete reciprocal interests.

Traditional strategic export sectors — cotton, cocoa, oil and gas — are still mainly organised around the production and export of raw materials by individual countries, without sufficient local transformation.

The limited scale of national production often prevents countries from building the processing infrastructure required to add value before export or to supply regional markets.

But what prevents African countries from joining forces?

Benin, for example, has begun experimenting with the transformation of cotton produced across several countries.

African states should develop partnerships bringing together governments and private-sector actors.

The question remains:

How can African Heads of State be encouraged to move beyond national approaches, think collectively and work more closely with their private sectors?

One possible obstacle is that such cooperation could seriously challenge interests linked to predatory practices surrounding international contracts and resource management.

4 — Expanding partnerships: these challenges also concern the Global North

The question should not be one of confrontation, but of cooperation:

“Let us see what we can achieve together.”

Africa must move towards openness rather than each country remaining isolated in its own sphere.

Partnerships should be built by examining what each country or group of countries can contribute, without prejudice and without unnecessary complexity.

This includes:

- the Global South, which is already highly present in Africa;
- the Mediterranean countries of Europe — Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Greece and others — which are geographically close neighbours;
- and what could be called the “**near South**”, partners sharing historical, economic and geographical links with the continent.

The objective should be to identify complementarities rather than reproduce dependency relationships.

5 — “Turning the informal sector into a strength”

In terms of employment, the legitimate informal sector represents on average more than 80% of economic activity in almost every African country.

This reality is usually considered a weakness. Yet it could become one of Africa’s greatest assets for the future.

Large-scale successful experiences have already demonstrated this possibility.

By providing informal economic actors with targeted tools, such as:

- access to banking services;
- recognised professional training;
- registration with chambers of crafts or professions;
- social protection;
- official recognition of their activities;

it is possible to rapidly transform fragile informal activities into viable economic enterprises.

This would benefit:

- the workers themselves, through greater dignity and security;
- the State, through recognition and better integration of economic activity;
- families, through more stable incomes.

In short, it would reduce vulnerability and precariousness.

The priority is not to eliminate the informal sector, but to organise, support and connect the actors and resources that already exist locally.

Success in this area would contribute to social peace by legally recognising and strengthening hundreds of thousands of jobs.

African countries can no longer ignore the informal economy or continue treating it as an activity existing “outside the system” — particularly because this exclusion often allows rent-seeking and predatory practices to continue.

Africa urgently needs to unlock the enormous transformative potential contained within this sector.

“SECURITY SOVEREIGNTY” IN THE FACE OF THREATS AND CROSS-CUTTING CHALLENGES

Security is the foundation of everything — at least of any economy, whether formal or informal.

In reality, insecurity is the main obstacle to economic sovereignty.

The security situation has deteriorated dramatically over recent years, with responsibilities shared between African actors and international partners.

A — THE SERIOUS SECURITY CRISIS: SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

At the beginning of the 1960s, there was neither a comprehensive strategy nor a long-term plan to strengthen African security and unity.

In the absence of external threats, national armies mainly remained focused on guarding borders and protecting — or sometimes overthrowing — political regimes.

1 — 1963: Creation of the OAU

In 1963, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was created, becoming the first pan-African institution bringing together 32 countries.

However, security cooperation remained limited, and the continent did not yet develop a common strategic vision.

2 — 1973: The strategic warning of Cheikh Anta Diop

After apartheid South Africa acquired nuclear weapons, Cheikh Anta Diop emphasised that security must come before development:

“We are too rich not to be coveted. We need an African army, we need security.”

His message was that Africa’s resources would inevitably attract external interests and that the continent needed collective security capacities to protect its future.

3 — 1980: The call for Africa to take responsibility for its own destiny

In 1980, Togolese politician Edem Kodjo, Secretary-General of the OAU, declared that Africa had to take its destiny into its own hands and promoted the “Plan for Africa’s Development.”

However, Western partners encouraged the implementation of structural adjustment policies, with a strong focus on governance issues — which were indeed real challenges.

Some development programmes were blocked, agricultural subsidies were suspended, and an early attempt at local industrial transformation was abruptly interrupted.

4 — The continuation of African institutional construction

The process of building African unity continued:

- **1994:** The Abuja Treaty was adopted, including the creation of frameworks for legal harmonisation, such as OHADA.
- **2001:** The NEPAD initiative was launched, resulting from the merger of Senegal’s “Omega Plan” (Abdoulaye Wade) and the “Millennium Africa Plan” promoted by Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Olusegun Obasanjo and Thabo Mbeki.
- **2002:** The OAU was replaced by the African Union (AU).

- **2013:** The African Union launched **Agenda 2063**.
- **2014:** Senegal introduced the **Emerging Senegal Plan (PSE)**, with a vision extending to 2035, which inspired similar approaches in several other African countries.

Ultimately, however, implementation remained highly unstable.

Where do we stand today?

The terrorist threat has emerged and continued to grow. Africa still suffers from a lack of comprehensive security, unity and shared strategic vision.

There are nevertheless some positive examples.

Mauritania, for instance, chose a different approach: rather than relying exclusively on military force, it developed a patient religious dialogue with jihadist ideology, supported by theological arguments drawn from Islamic texts. This approach helped undermine, for many individuals, the theological legitimacy claimed by extremist movements.

WESTERN COUNTRIES ALSO BEAR PART OF THE RESPONSIBILITY

The destruction of Libya represents a major turning point.

African Heads of State opposed the intervention. Their concerns were not taken into account.

Africa was not represented on the United Nations Security Council and therefore had no ability to block the resolution authorising military intervention.

The consequences of the Libyan collapse continue to affect regional security, particularly through the spread of weapons, armed groups and instability across the Sahel.

AFRICAN COUNTRIES ALSO BEAR PART OF THE RESPONSIBILITY

1 — The failure to pool African security forces

At a time when the deterioration of the security situation required immediate action, everyone was saying:

“Mali must be saved!”

Yet only Chad intervened militarily.

Many soldiers were reluctant to accept orders from foreign commanders or to participate in integrated multinational forces.

However, this was precisely what was required: the pooling of African capacities.

This effort was weakened by misleading debates about the supposed loss of “national sovereignty”.

Meanwhile, jihadist groups were already pooling their forces and openly pursuing the objective of establishing an Islamic Caliphate in the Sahel, with access to the Atlantic coast and potential expansion towards countries such as Benin and Togo.

2 — The terrible human cost

The human toll has been devastating.

Estimates include:

- approximately **40,000 deaths linked to Boko Haram**;
- around **25,000 deaths in Burkina Faso**;
- thousands of military casualties among Malian and Nigerien armed forces;

- and an enormous number of civilian victims.

These figures illustrate the scale of the security crisis facing the continent.

3 — A major asymmetry in information and international attention

There is a striking imbalance in the way security crises are perceived.

The killing of four American soldiers in Niger generated extensive international media attention.

Yet when thousands of Africans are killed, there is often little reaction — neither in Europe nor even within Africa itself.

African lives and security challenges frequently receive disproportionately limited international attention.

4 — ECOWAS has remained largely absent

There has been a striking silence from regional governments.

No major summit of Heads of State was convened, despite the fact that combating terrorism and preventing military coups are among ECOWAS's stated responsibilities.

There has been no effective regional ECOWAS strategy against jihadism and organised crime.

Neither solidarity nor the pooling of forces — both of which are essential — has materialised.

B — THE HOLISTIC DIMENSION OF SECURITY

Security cannot be reduced to military responses alone. It has a much broader dimension, involving the presence of the State, economic conditions, social cohesion, governance and the relationship between citizens and institutions.

1 — The absence of the State in remote areas

The State no longer adequately provides basic services to populations living in remote and peripheral areas.

This absence has allowed terrorist movements to establish themselves and gain lasting influence.

Ultimately, the State is no longer fully ensuring security throughout its own territory.

Sovereignty was initially conceived mainly as a defensive concept: a shield protecting countries against external interference.

Today, it must also become a positive sovereignty, centred on protecting and serving populations.

A State's legitimacy is not measured only by its ability to defend borders, but also by its capacity to provide security, justice and essential services to its citizens.

2 — The failures of security force cooperation

The need for a transnational response led to the creation of the G5 Sahel in January 2014.

However, it was eventually dissolved because the expected external financial support did not materialise sufficiently.

Once again, the issue of sovereignty became central: cooperation mechanisms remained fragile because political willingness did not always match the scale of the challenge.

The Multinational Joint Task Force, created by the countries surrounding Lake Chad (Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad), achieved some initial successes.

However, its future has become uncertain, particularly following Niger's withdrawal.

3 — The new threat posed by private military and security companies

Beyond terrorism, organised crime and military coups, another emerging threat comes from non-state actors involved in security operations.

Private military organisations such as Wagner, Africa Corps and others claim to provide security for governments while fighting armed opposition groups or terrorist movements.

Yet, in the name of defending national sovereignty, some States risk weakening their own economic and institutional foundations by diverting mining revenues and public resources to finance these forces, at the expense of their populations.

The result may be the opposite of the stated objective: a weakening of the State itself.

4 — The ambiguity of proclaimed sovereignties

Countries that strongly proclaim their sovereignty sometimes do not hesitate to request external intervention when facing serious crises.

In 2013, the Malian government itself requested French military intervention. The first phase of this intervention was widely considered successful in preventing the immediate collapse of the State.

Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, faced with the continuing conflict in the east of the country, demonstrations in Kinshasa targeted foreign embassies to denounce international silence.

This paradox illustrates the ambiguity of sovereignty: States may reject external involvement in principle while simultaneously seeking international assistance when their own capacities prove insufficient.

C — RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING INTER- AFRICAN SECURITY

Ten major recommendations have been formulated to strengthen security cooperation among African countries.

1 — “THE SOVEREIGNTY OF POPULATIONS”

The vacuum left by the State in remote areas must be addressed through effective decentralisation.

Local populations must be empowered and given greater responsibility.

The objective is to build a strong social contract, which constitutes the foundation of genuine popular sovereignty.

Today, two forms of sovereignty are clearly disconnected:

- the sovereignty claimed by governing authorities;
- the sovereignty experienced by populations themselves.

True security requires reconnecting the two.

2 — “PLACING WOMEN AT THE HEART OF SECURITY ISSUES”

At the international level

In 2000, a United Nations Security Council resolution called for increasing women’s participation in:

- conflict prevention;
- conflict resolution;
- peacebuilding.

In 2015, another resolution reaffirmed that both women and men must play roles in:

- border governance;
- preventing violent extremism;
- addressing the consequences of climate change.

Other international frameworks have also highlighted the importance of youth involvement.

Women’s participation in mediation processes is particularly important because it allows greater access to younger generations.

As mothers, wives and citizens, women often possess approaches that are closely connected to local realities and regional cooperation.

At the national level

Women remain insufficiently represented in security debates and should occupy a much more central role.

They are often the first victims of injustice, violence and insecurity.

The question is therefore:

How can women be concretely and effectively involved in security strategies?

Can religion and history provide additional resources?

Historical and cultural references may also contribute to changing perceptions.

Khadija, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, was both a woman and a successful merchant who travelled extensively. Her example could be used to support arguments in favour of women’s freedom and economic participation.

In Benin, history can also be mobilised through the figure of the “Amazons”, women warriors who historically defended part of the territory.

Such references can help connect contemporary gender issues with African and religious historical narratives.

3 — “RECOGNISING THE NEED FOR STRATEGIC PARTNERS”

a) Looking and listening “far and wide” is essential for national security

Security today requires a broad perspective.

Intelligence is becoming increasingly satellite-based, and warfare is becoming increasingly drone-based.

Does Africa currently have the necessary capabilities?

To anticipate threats, intelligence services must be modernised, cooperation strengthened within each country through permanent structures, and security strategies developed with the support of indispensable strategic partners.

No country can effectively face contemporary threats alone.

b) Trust is the foundation of intelligence cooperation

Trust is the essential foundation of intelligence.

As long as countries and institutions do not know each other sufficiently, and as long as confidence has not been established between security structures, serious difficulties remain.

Trust must be built not only during crises, but also in times of peace.

Intelligence cooperation cannot be improvised when a threat emerges; it requires long-term relationships, shared procedures and mutual confidence.

c) At the regional level, mistrust must be overcome

At the regional level, it is necessary to “remove mistrust”, because collective decision-making capacity is gradually weakening.

Africa must promote everything that strengthens regional interdependence.

Security threats do not stop at borders. Cooperation is therefore not a political choice alone; it is a strategic necessity.

d) National intelligence services must be strengthened and protected

National intelligence structures remain vulnerable.

They must be strengthened, protected and made more resilient — in other words, they must be “bunkerised” against external interference, internal instability and political manipulation.

4 — “CO-CONSTRUCTING SECURITY”

Security is everyone’s responsibility, and particularly that of civil society. It cannot be considered the exclusive responsibility of security forces.

Terrorist organisations exploit weaknesses within societies and take advantage of areas where the State is absent.

In Egypt, Islamist movements were able to occupy the space left by a State that no longer provided sufficient services to populations in rural areas.

Similarly, in Turkey under President Erdoğan, Islamist organisations progressively expanded their influence in areas such as education and social services.

When the State disappears from certain territories, a vacuum is created. Organisations with external funding can then occupy this space and prepare the ground for future political influence.

This is why fighting insecurity requires addressing:

- poverty;
- social frustration;
- exclusion;
- poor governance.

A process of economic and social co-construction is required, involving all actors through:

- decentralisation;
- promotion of justice and equity;
- stronger participation of local communities.

It is also essential to actively fight false narratives and disinformation.

This highlights the importance of independent civil society organisations capable of producing credible information and strengthening social resilience.

5 — “LINKING SOVEREIGNTY WITH SOLIDARITY”

Africa includes many countries that are extremely rich in natural resources.

The Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, is too rich not to attract competition and external interest.

Many global and regional powers are seeking to secure their future supplies of rare and strategic minerals.

To achieve this objective, all means may be used. Unfortunately, the most damaging methods are often among those employed.

Clearly, some African countries will not be able to defend themselves alone — militarily, economically, commercially or diplomatically.

Faced with such challenges, countries cannot act individually.

The concept of solidarity must therefore be integrated into the concept of sovereignty across all African institutions.

Today, one cannot exist without the other.

A country’s sovereignty is strengthened, not weakened, when it is supported by regional solidarity.

6 — “RESTORING TRUST IN THE STATE”

The foundation of security is trust between citizens and institutions.

Yet this trust has eroded among a large part of the population.

This loss of confidence has direct security consequences.

In Mali, during the early stages of rebellion, there was no need for drones or sophisticated technology: farmers and herders informed authorities about movements and risks.

Today, village leaders often say:

“I stopped reporting.”

In territories under terrorist pressure, representatives of the State often provide more services of extraction and control than services to the population.

Terrorist groups frequently understand local realities better than State authorities, who are often perceived as outsiders focused mainly on capital cities.

To restore confidence, the State must “use intelligence more than force.”

Mauritania provides an interesting example. Instead of relying exclusively on military repression, it developed patient religious dialogue with jihadist ideology, supported by Islamic theological arguments.

This approach helped undermine the religious legitimacy claimed by extremist movements.

7 — “BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN AFRICAN COUNTRIES”

Strengthening cooperation between armed forces

Individually, African armies often lack sufficient resources.

Why not create genuine joint forces by pooling the capacities of several national armies?

With genuine political commitment, this would become much easier.

Cooperation must also be strengthened at the regional level.

Trust is essential.

The conditions necessary to build it are:

- peace;
- stability;
- security.

Security has no borders and concerns everyone.

To achieve this, African countries must work together around a common vision and learn from history.

African Heads of State have often been constrained by national interests — and sometimes personal interests — whereas solidarity between leaders is essential for the survival of all.

History provides several lessons.

In 1992, the United Nations Security Council imposed an air embargo on Libya. Yet several African leaders — including those from Ghana, Mali, Chad and Guinea — did not hesitate to violate the embargo in order to visit Muammar Gaddafi and participate in revolutionary celebrations.

In 2011, Idriss Déby stated after the intervention that led to Gaddafi's overthrow and assassination:

“There was no after-sales service.”

No African leader had been able to effectively oppose the decisions of Western powers beyond expressing verbal criticism.

Everything begins with trust — first within national armies themselves.

Security cooperation requires integrating all national components and establishing both:

- internal trust within States;
- external trust between States.

8 — “RETHINKING OUR INSTITUTIONS AND REVIEWING OUR STRATEGIES”

a) Rethinking our institutions

For many issues, fundamental ambiguities remain unresolved.

i. Clarifying the choice between intergovernmentalism and federalism

Africa must clarify the institutional model it wishes to pursue.

Should cooperation remain essentially based on sovereign States acting together, or should it gradually move towards stronger forms of integration?

This debate cannot remain theoretical. Institutional choices must correspond to the realities and ambitions of the continent.

ii. Establishing credible mechanisms of sanctions

Regional organisations need effective mechanisms to sanction those who do not respect common rules.

This remains a major challenge, particularly for ECOWAS.

An organisation whose decisions cannot be enforced risks losing credibility.

Rules without consequences remain merely declarations of intent.

iii. Restoring coherence between State, territory and society

Today, political and administrative life remains excessively concentrated in capitals.

Decision-makers often live in a world very different from that experienced by ordinary populations.

Many States are weakening from the bottom upwards: the poorest and most marginalised regions are often those most exposed to insecurity.

The relationship between the State and its territories must therefore be rebuilt.

Security cannot be guaranteed only from capitals; it must be rooted in local realities.

iv. Mobilising history as a strategic resource

History must become an essential tool for understanding contemporary challenges.

Jihadist movements often use pre-colonial historical narratives and local memories to strengthen their legitimacy.

In some cases, they demonstrate a deeper historical understanding than State authorities themselves.

There are also historical continuities, including certain dynamics inherited from relations between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, which have sometimes contributed to forms of domination and marginalisation.

Africa cannot move forward if it does not know its own history.

b) Reviewing our strategies

Africa is facing a new historical turning point.

The continent must recognise emerging challenges and rethink its strategies.

Three major transformations must be taken into account:

- **Demographic change**, which is connected to almost every other issue and must become a central parameter of public policy;
- **The expanding security challenge**, which is spreading geographically and affecting countries that previously underestimated the threat;
- **The profound transformation of geopolitics**, including changing relations with neighbouring countries and external powers.

b1 — Security action has become a “complex problem”

Security challenges today require differentiated responses.

• Ideological security threats

Some insecurity phenomena are ideological in nature and combine:

- security vulnerabilities;
- economic frustrations;
- social exclusion.

A purely military response may worsen the situation.

Security responses must therefore be combined with civilian approaches addressing the underlying causes.

• Conventional security threats

Other threats are more traditional:

- organised crime;
- drug trafficking;
- criminal networks.

These require firm and determined responses.

Complicity must also be investigated, including when it involves individuals or structures within State institutions.

• **The less-discussed issue: the “economy of terror”**

Terrorist movements also depend on financial, commercial and logistical systems.

This “economy of terror” is expanding.

To weaken these organisations, it is necessary to target:

- money laundering;
- illegal financial networks;
- commercial channels supporting criminal activities.

Money laundering should not be confused with ordinary smuggling; they are different phenomena requiring different responses.

The objective must be to act early:

“Cut the lion’s tail while it is still young.”

b2 — Establishing effective border management policies

Africa’s economy is approximately 80% informal.

Large parts of national territories remain outside effective State control.

In many isolated areas:

- State presence is weak;
- administrative capacities are limited;
- State influence decreases with distance from capitals;
- even official actors may contribute to weakening institutional authority.

All these factors create fertile ground for insecurity.

A genuine border management policy must therefore be developed through:

- key specialised services;
- cooperation between neighbouring countries;
- coordinated action on both sides of borders.

Borders should not only be seen as lines of defence but also as areas requiring cooperation and shared governance.

9 — “APPROACHING THESE REFORMS WITH REALISM”

To implement these new strategies realistically, several points of caution must be considered.

a) Many armed conflicts are not related to terrorism or jihadism

Africa faces numerous armed conflicts that have different origins and dynamics.

Some concern among the most populated countries of the continent, including:

- the Democratic Republic of Congo;
- Ethiopia.

Security strategies must therefore avoid focusing exclusively on jihadist threats.

b) The African Union is a construction process

The African Union is not a finished political entity; it is a gradual construction.

Realism is necessary regarding the battles that can actually be won.

Federalism, although sometimes advocated, is unlikely to be achievable in the short term.

Time is Africa's most valuable resource.

Institutional transformation requires patience, confidence-building and gradual progress.

c) Diverging choices regarding external partners

African countries do not all share the same views regarding strategic partners.

Different choices of alliances have consequences for national and regional security.

These choices must be discussed openly and thoroughly.

But are they actually being debated collectively?

d) The question of the armed forces themselves

There is increasing discussion about pooling or even integrating African armed forces.

But a fundamental question must be asked:

Are all these forces truly worthy of trust and respect?

Are they genuinely instruments of sovereignty and protection of populations?

Security institutions must first meet standards of professionalism, legitimacy and accountability.

e) Finding a genuine factor of continental unity

What could truly unite African countries?

Climate change may represent one such common challenge.

Its consequences will go far beyond political disagreements between regimes.

Building cooperation around this issue could have real meaning and contribute to the construction of African unity.

10 — “TAKING THE FULANI QUESTION INTO ACCOUNT”

The transnational Fulani community issue has not received sufficient attention from African States.

It is deeper and more complex than it may appear, and it raises serious concerns for the future.

There exists a profound frustration among certain communities, which is rarely openly acknowledged and which continues to grow.

Many Fulani people feel marginalised or excluded, and terrorist organisations — which possess detailed knowledge of local populations — exploit these frustrations.

Even if terrorism is eventually defeated, unresolved social and political grievances will remain.

Addressing these frustrations is therefore essential for long-term peace and stability.

D — STRENGTHENING THE CONNECTION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

African security cannot be considered in isolation.

Talking about sovereignty, autonomy and security requires a connection with the international security system as it exists today.

The objective is not to renounce sovereignty, but to understand that contemporary threats — terrorism, organised crime, cyber threats, climate insecurity, competition over strategic resources — are global in nature.

A sovereign Africa must therefore also be an Africa capable of influencing international decisions.

1 — CONNECTING MORE EFFECTIVELY TO INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

a) A missed historical opportunity for Africa

At the end of apartheid in South Africa, discussions took place about granting Africa a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Ultimately, African countries failed to agree on a common candidate.

This was a missed opportunity.

The continent therefore remained absent from one of the main institutions responsible for global security decisions.

b) Africa remains insufficiently represented in major security forums

When African security issues are discussed in international forums, African representatives are often absent or insufficiently influential.

How can decisions concerning Africa be fully relevant if those making them do not have direct knowledge of African realities?

At recent international security meetings, attention has often focused overwhelmingly on conflicts elsewhere — particularly Ukraine — while crises such as those affecting the Sahel have received limited attention.

Africa must therefore be present in global discussions.

Speaking about sovereignty and autonomy does not mean withdrawing from the international system.

On the contrary:

Africa must participate actively in shaping international security debates.

This is also Africa's responsibility.

2 — CONNECTING MORE STRONGLY TO INTERNATIONAL LAW

The concept of “security sovereignty” promoted by some governments today raises important legal and political questions.

Several notions require clarification.

a) The use of the words “terrorist” and “terrorism”

The terms “terrorist” and “terrorism” are sometimes subject to political and legal manipulation.

They can be used by governments to delegitimise opposition movements or suppress forms of political contestation that are considered threatening.

The use of these terms must therefore be approached with extreme caution.

It is essential to distinguish between:

- genuine terrorist violence;
- political opposition;

- legitimate social demands;
- local conflicts linked to governance failures.

A purely security-based approach risks ignoring the deeper causes of insecurity.

The priority should be to understand and reduce the causes of violent extremism, not only to respond militarily after violence has occurred.

As the saying goes:

“Whoever wants to drown his dog claims it has rabies.”

b) The issue of mercenarism

The privatisation of violence through private military organisations is a relatively new phenomenon.

It represents a way of circumventing international law, which traditionally condemns armed intervention by one State in another State.

To avoid direct responsibility for actions and possible violations, some States have increasingly relied on mercenary groups and later on private military companies.

It is important to remember that African countries themselves played a leading role in developing international rules against mercenarism:

- in 1977 through the Organisation of African Unity (OAU);
- in 1989 through the United Nations.

Yet today, some African governments themselves rely on private military companies linked to foreign powers.

This creates serious concerns regarding:

- accountability;
- protection of civilian populations;
- control of national resources;
- genuine sovereignty.

c) The concept of “collective security”

Today, sovereignty is often presented as the central reference point.

However, this concept is too broad and sometimes insufficiently adapted to contemporary threats, particularly:

- terrorism;
- transnational armed groups;
- private military actors.

The concept of collective security appears more relevant because it implies coordination and coherence between different levels:

- local;
- national;
- regional;
- continental.

Security challenges require collective responses.

Security must also be understood as a fundamental right of individuals and populations.

It is not only a privilege of States.

The right of citizens to security creates obligations for public authorities.

Populations whose security is at stake must therefore participate in identifying solutions and implementing them.

Experience shows that this approach can produce promising results.

3 — THE BENIN EXAMPLE: A GLOBAL APPROACH TO SECURITY

Benin has developed an approach that could inspire other countries.

a) Institutional reform

The country merged:

- the gendarmerie;
- the republican police.

The objective was to create a security institution considered closer to populations.

b) Combining ground operations with aerial capabilities

Benin has supported territorial security operations through aerial resources, particularly to strengthen border protection.

This has involved cooperation with strategic partners.

c) Regional cooperation against terrorism

Benin has supported the revival of the Accra Initiative.

This approach aims to reinforce:

- intelligence sharing;
- joint operational capacities;
- resilience of local communities;
- cooperation between security forces and civil society.

d) Security is not only a military matter

A fundamental principle is:

“National defence is not only the responsibility of soldiers.”

Security requires socio-economic measures, particularly in vulnerable border areas.

Without development, education, employment and public services, military responses alone cannot provide lasting stability.

e) Strategic partnerships

Benin has developed partnerships with several countries, including:

- the United States;
- France;
- Belgium.

These partnerships concern:

- equipment;
- training;
- operational preparation.

The objective is not dependency, but strengthening national and regional capacities.

f) Taking care of victims

Security policies must also address the consequences of violence.

This includes support for:

- military victims;
- civilian victims;
- families and dependants affected by insecurity.

A State that protects its defenders and its citizens strengthens the social contract at the heart of sovereignty.

Conclusion of Session 3

The central message of this chapter is that **security sovereignty cannot be reduced to military independence or rejection of external influence.**

A genuine security sovereignty requires:

- States present throughout their territories;
- populations involved and protected;
- regional solidarity;
- professional and accountable security forces;
- strategic partnerships chosen freely;
- respect for international law;
- confidence between citizens and institutions.

The key transition is therefore from a **sovereignty of governments** to a **sovereignty of peoples**, supported by **collective security**.

Session 4

NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES AND AFRICAN CULTURES IN THE FACE OF GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS AND COMPETING SPHERES OF INFLUENCE
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Thinking about sovereignty raises, for societies, the fundamental question of “otherness” — of the “relationship with the other” — at different levels: national, through decentralisation; regional, through neighbourhood relations and borders; continental, through the ideal of Pan-Africanism; and global, through the forces of globalisation.

This generates both claims to sovereignty and structural blockages that must be analysed through anthropological, sociological, economic and energy-related perspectives.

Eight recommendations follow, together with proposals for their implementation.

A – DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF AFRICAN SOVEREIGNTY IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS

1 – A “fluid” sovereignty viewed through the lens of lived realities

a. What power is exercised in the name of sovereignty? And by whom?

African sovereignties are still largely asserted at the level of discourse. National cultures have not yet truly succeeded in “cementing sovereignty into everyday experience.” They are often reduced to objects of display and folklore, or instrumentalised as identity-based claims challenging the central state, from which many areas — particularly remote regions — remain partially disconnected.

b. Silent but profound transformations...

Deep reconfigurations are taking place in terms of identity, authority and cultural legitimacy. While African states oscillate between symbolic assertions of autonomy and diplomatic alignment strategies, local actors sometimes seek refuge in new and evolving cultural identities.

Things are moving.

c. A changing landscape also in relation to Culture

Identity should not be understood as something fixed, but rather as a set of influences shaped as much by power relations as by symbols, knowledge systems and invisible flows.

Questioning how actors negotiate sovereignty in their daily practices leads to several recurring observations.

Culture encompasses language, traditions, values and beliefs. It is a composite and complex whole, difficult to articulate within a single framework.

National unity and social cohesion are categories that culture can help strengthen. But to what extent does the central state genuinely acknowledge and integrate this dynamic?

Questions of diplomacy and geopolitics are now widely discussed and debated across the plurality of cultural communities that make up African countries.

Resistance to foreign influence — as a form of protection against assimilation — has become increasingly significant, especially with the major role played by social networks, which can serve both as instruments of manipulation and as tools for raising awareness among groups that previously did not necessarily question certain realities.

Yet culture is also a source of inspiration, innovation, and economic and social development. By relying on endogenous cultures, it becomes possible to rethink sovereignty from a different perspective and identify new opportunities.

But how can one build a national identity carried by a national culture, given the weight of colonial legacies and the diversity of historical experiences, knowledge systems and external influences?

It should also be noted that, because of the global circulation of cultural products (music, videos, and other creative expressions), sovereignty can no longer be conceived solely within national frameworks, but must also be considered at continental and even global levels.

Africa has succeeded in making its voice heard worldwide through its music. It occupies a legitimate place across all artistic fields.

d. Border areas as revealing spaces of this crisis

Borderlands are particularly revealing spaces where this crisis becomes visible.

The ongoing tension between local and global dynamics concerns, on one side, increasingly impersonal and standardised cultures, while, on the other, local communities maintain powerful identity-based cultures seeking renewed vitality.

The question of national culture is even more important because states themselves are not yet fully consolidated, and neither are their borders.

They remain “**works in progress**”, and much remains to be achieved between central authorities and peripheral territories in order to establish the foundations of a “**complete and genuine sovereignty**.”

2 – “Economic sovereignty”: a result, not something that can simply be proclaimed...

One observation is unavoidable: “**The World is becoming more African**,” as the *New York Times* recently put it.

The world is becoming increasingly African. For better or for worse?

As already noted, Africa is the youngest region of the world. The implications of this reality are not exclusively negative.

The extraordinary development of Nollywood in Nigeria, the growing presence of youth throughout the music sector, cultural industries, communication platforms, major sporting arenas, and many other fields will inevitably strengthen Africa’s **soft power**.

There exists an extraordinary “**learning potential**” for the entire continent.

Everything that is said about the importance of industrial policies is equally valid for cultural and creative industries, which represent major sources of employment.

They have the potential to become powerful engines of future development.

Hence the strategic importance of “**investing in people**” and strengthening capabilities.

(See: *African Youth: “Time Bomb” or Historic Opportunity?* on www.initiative-afrique.org)

However, instability and insecurity must be addressed by pursuing three objectives simultaneously:

- **Building the link between governments and citizens**, by reflecting on appropriate forms of democracy.
- **Creating the conditions** for a strong economy.
- **Building a strong, structured and effective state**, which may take different forms, but must enable citizens to live in a “**good country**.”

These three conditions are necessary in order to engage with the world with greater confidence and to develop the capacity to build genuine sovereignty.

3 – Between claims of sovereignty and real or perceived “dependencies”: clarification is needed

Aventure ambiguë ends with the sentence:

“We too must learn how to win without being right.”

Africa sometimes practices what could be called “**the art of losing without being aware of it**.”

Certain forms of dependency remain largely invisible.

a. The CFA franc

The CFA franc is often discussed in terms of sovereignty, focusing on France's role, while other dimensions are overlooked.

In 2010, in Côte d'Ivoire, the Council of Ministers of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) recognised Alassane Ouattara's victory and prevented Laurent Gbagbo from accessing the reserves held by the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO).

This can be interpreted as a form of **accepted dependency** that African states have maintained for decades, without always being fully conscious of its implications.

b. International aid

The way international aid is generally perceived may not always reflect the full complexity of the issue.

Is it genuinely a form of neo-colonialism, an infringement upon sovereignty?

The reduction — or even interruption — of aid has highlighted its necessity in many areas: building roads and hospitals, supporting refugees, caring for people suffering from chronic diseases.

As long as states are unable to provide these essential services themselves, international assistance should not be considered shameful.

(But does this mean that resources are truly unavailable, or have they been diverted elsewhere?)

Aid has sometimes served as a façade behind which mismanagement and diversion of resources could occur.

Rather than rejecting it entirely, should it not instead be renegotiated with donors, so that it contributes to the implementation of genuinely sovereign economic policies and supports local value creation — rather than indirectly reinforcing neo-colonial systems of extraction and rent-based exploitation of resources?

However, as Western countries gradually abandon the objective of allocating 0.7% of national wealth to development assistance — and particularly as the United States moves towards eliminating such programmes altogether — it becomes clear that international aid remains essential today for very concrete purposes: feeding refugees, building childcare facilities, and supporting basic services.

c. Influence struggles are discussed, but what about “influences without struggle”?

Our legal systems — often criticised for inefficient courts, the lack of separation of powers, and other weaknesses — are largely inherited structures that have never truly been reconsidered.

In Francophone countries, the entire judicial architecture remains dependent on government structures.

The very idea of an independent judiciary is often difficult to imagine.

This dependence creates enormous opportunities for corruption.

In Uganda or Kenya, for example, which follow a different legal tradition, the Judicial Service Commission plays a central role in judicial appointments and careers. It is largely composed of independent judges and legal professionals.

This damaging influence on state justice systems is not externally imposed; rather, it is a legacy that has rarely been fundamentally challenged.

A “**true sovereignty**” requires the ability to reflect critically on existing systems and identify alternative models — many of which already exist elsewhere.

B – THE “FOUNDATIONS” OF A GENUINE AFRICAN SOVEREIGNTY

1. Never lose sight of demographics

By 2050, Africa will be the most populated continent in the world.

For this demographic reality to become an opportunity rather than a burden, immediate priority must be given to education, health, and all other drivers of future development.

2. Planning is more essential than ever

Past experiences offer important lessons:

“We are coming from very far away! In the 2000s, the long term meant next week!”

Because of the lack of a SADC decision to restore water flows to Lake Chad — which would have helped maintain Chadian populations in their traditional areas — Chadian pastoralists have moved their herds into the Central African Republic, generating new security challenges.

Vision and strategy are urgently needed.

By 2050, the average age in Africa will be 23 years, while many countries elsewhere will face ageing populations.

Africa must anticipate future needs in terms of employment, education, skills development and professions.

Above all, it must not simply “sit and wait” for 2050.

Achieving this is possible with strong political determination.

The example of Benin demonstrates this.

Since 2000, Benin has developed a forward-looking approach towards 2025.

In 2016, despite limited progress, the decision was taken to “**restore planning in Benin and revive the Benin ALAFIA vision.**”

A ten-year National Development Plan effectively provided a framework for government action and introduced mechanisms of monitoring and accountability towards citizens.

The positive consequences are visible throughout the country, particularly at the end of the second presidential term.

The challenges and objectives are broadly similar across Africa.

An evaluation was conducted at the end of the implementation of ALAFIA 2025, together with a 30-year prospective study entitled:

“**The Benin We Dream Of, after a Century of Independence.**”

The population was consulted, including the youngest generations — because in thirty years, today’s fifteen-year-olds will be among the country’s leaders.

The question asked was:

“**What kind of Benin do you dream of?**”

The dominant answers were:

- A world without inequality;
- A world where children are no longer abused;
- A country where we can find employment;
- A Benin where tomorrow we will all live in peace.

This vision is certainly shared across all African societies:

“Africa’s diversity” is undeniable, but there is undoubtedly a broad consensus around the idea of a “dreamed Africa.”

C – EIGHT KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACHIEVING GENUINE AFRICAN SOVEREIGNTY

Recommendation 1 – TURNING AN EVOLVING CLASH OF CULTURES INTO A POSITIVE FORCE

Challenging persistent misconceptions

Claiming that Africa historically lacked institutions is to ignore its history, its values and its civilisational heritage.

In the Sahel, the **Manden Charter** dates back to 1236 and governed a vast political and cultural space encompassing the Mandinka, Malinké, Dyula and related peoples.

In East Africa, the kingdoms of the Great Lakes and the Ethiopian Highlands have centuries-old state traditions.

Africa also developed indigenous social institutions such as the palaver tree, where dialogue and consensus-building were central to community governance, and the practice of joking kinship, which has long served as a mechanism for conflict prevention and social cohesion. Traditional masks likewise fulfilled important educational and civic functions.

Better understanding today's youth

A common criticism is that **"today's young people are educated by their smartphones rather than by their societies."**

Many no longer possess sufficient knowledge of their own cultural heritage or traditional mechanisms of social regulation. At the same time, they are particularly vulnerable to manipulation.

A single video posted online can reach millions of viewers within hours.

How should African societies respond?

This has become a major challenge.

It inevitably raises broader questions concerning education, including the place of African history and traditional cultures within school curricula.

The transmission of values, however, cannot be confined to formal education alone.

It must also embrace the diversity of Africa's cultural traditions.

Preserving identity while embracing openness

How can Africa preserve its identity while ensuring its development?

The answer is not withdrawal, but confidence:

to remain oneself while learning from others whatever strengthens one's own capacity to succeed.

Giving Africa its rightful place in the world requires several complementary approaches:

- understanding culture as a dynamic, evolving reality rather than as a fixed essence. Cultures possess histories; they constantly evolve and are also shaped by deeply rooted religious traditions;
- adopting a confident, forward-looking approach to culture, studying African thinkers whose work combines intellectual openness with creative innovation rather than cultural isolation;
- remaining firmly rooted in one's own identity while being fully capable of cooperating with others and participating in wider systems of exchange;
- promoting multilingualism as a strategic asset. Local African languages deserve strong support, but without encouraging cultural isolation. Shared languages—whatever they may be according to context—remain essential instruments of dialogue. French and English have now become part of Africa's linguistic landscape through historical appropriation;
- recognising Africa's exceptional human capital as one of its greatest strategic assets. The continent possesses an immense reservoir of creativity that remains largely underexploited, despite growing global demand for creative industries and innovation.

Recommendation 2 – EDUCATION: REBUILD THE HOUSE FROM ITS FOUNDATIONS

There is a growing concern that **too many children are leaving school without acquiring the competencies needed to succeed anywhere.**

Rebuilding education therefore requires rebuilding the entire system from the ground up.

Understanding a long-term decline

The roots of today's crisis can be traced back to the early years of independence.

As newly independent states expanded their administrations, they recruited many of the country's best graduates into the civil service.

Teaching, offering fewer career prospects and lower social prestige, gradually lost its most talented professionals.

Vacancies were filled by less qualified candidates, leading to a progressive decline in educational quality.

With each successive generation, weaker graduates became teachers themselves, reinforcing a downward spiral.

At the same time, teachers' salaries steadily lost ground relative to other public-sector occupations, while offering none of the opportunities for rent-seeking available elsewhere in government.

Political elites paid little attention to this deterioration, as many chose to educate their own children in elite private schools or abroad.

Half a century later, many young Africans possess qualifications that provide neither employment nor social mobility, generating deep frustration and disillusionment.

Improving the quality of learning

The fundamental question is not simply whether children attend school, but **what they are actually learning.**

Improving educational quality requires a comprehensive reform agenda.

School curricula must be modernised, but above all teacher training must be profoundly strengthened.

The teaching profession itself must once again become attractive.

Africa should abandon the illusion that inexpensive public education alone constitutes success if it fails to produce meaningful learning outcomes.

Aligning education with labour market realities

Education must prepare young people for the labour markets that actually exist.

The public sector—once the preferred destination for graduates—can no longer absorb growing numbers of job seekers.

The formal private sector recruits only a limited number of workers and often finds that graduates lack the required skills.

Technical education, vocational training and apprenticeship systems therefore deserve far greater priority.

These systems may require substantial reform, but such reforms should be led primarily by professionals and employers rather than by administrative bureaucracies.

Educating responsible citizens

Education must also transmit civic values and provide the geopolitical understanding necessary for young Africans to become informed actors in shaping their own future.

(See GIAF recommendations: *African Youth: Time Bomb or Historic Opportunity?*)

Recommendation 3 – DEFENDING THE DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE

Africa must reaffirm its commitment to democracy.

A return to either civilian or military authoritarianism will not provide Africa's youth with the conditions needed to realise their full potential.

Today, many young Africans express growing scepticism towards democracy, viewing it as incompatible with African societies, inherently Western in origin, and ultimately ineffective.

Yet what many have experienced over the past two or three decades has often been only the appearance of democracy.

Behind democratic vocabulary frequently lay systems characterised by corruption, nepotism, injustice, repression and predatory governance.

Words must therefore recover their true meaning.

One should not throw away democracy because of its distorted implementation.

Forms of democratic governance have existed historically in Africa, as illustrated by traditions such as the Manden Charter.

What matters is less a particular institutional model than the values democracy embodies: freedom, accountability and a balanced relationship between governments and citizens.

Democracy enables individuals to express themselves freely, to practise their faith without fear, to choose their own way of life, to improve their social condition through merit, to assume public responsibilities when entrusted by their fellow citizens, to enjoy secure property rights, to obtain impartial justice and to offer their children genuine opportunities for advancement.

Just as there are many species of fish while all remain fish, there is no single model of democracy.

Nevertheless, several fundamental principles are indispensable:

- individual liberty;

- the rule of law;
- separation of powers;
- and the participation of citizens in choosing their leaders through free, transparent and credible elections.

These democratic foundations are non-negotiable.

Some argue that democracy is incompatible with African culture.

The opposite is arguably true.

In ethnically diverse societies seeking to strengthen the relationship between governments and citizens, democratic governance—provided that minority rights are effectively protected—may well represent the political system best suited to Africa's realities.

Recommendation 4 – IMPROVING GOVERNANCE AND REDUCING THE SOURCES OF PUBLIC FRUSTRATION

States bear a major responsibility for the insecurity affecting many parts of Africa. In most cases, insecurity is less the cause than the consequence of institutional fragility. It stems from the erosion of state authority, repeated violations of constitutional principles, poorly organised or non-credible elections, and persistent failures of economic governance. These shortcomings generate frustration, weaken public trust and create fertile ground for instability.

Governance deficits remain profound in a number of countries, whether in the political, economic or democratic spheres. Too often, political alternation simply replaces one ruling coalition with another that proceeds to appropriate public resources much as its predecessors did. The incoming leadership frequently repeats the very practices for which the previous one had been criticised.

In reality, many existing systems are structured around the extraction of rents by those who control positions of power. Political change therefore often amounts to replacing one group of predators with another, without transforming the rules of the game.

The challenge must therefore be addressed at its roots by rebuilding a stable social contract founded on justice, accountability and equal opportunity.

A development model centred on entrepreneurship—rather than on the distribution of political rents—would profoundly alter existing incentives. By encouraging productive investment instead of predation, it would strengthen the rule of law, improve transparency and lay the foundations for more inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Recommendation 5 – ADDRESSING THE GROWING RESENTMENT SURROUNDING THE FULANI QUESTION

The often-repeated assertion that *"not all Fulani are terrorists, but all terrorists—or potential terrorists—are Fulani"* is both dangerous and profoundly misleading.

Such narratives fuel collective stigmatisation, exacerbate intercommunal tensions and can ultimately trigger violence. They must therefore be firmly rejected and systematically deconstructed.

Viewed from within, Fulani society is far more diverse and complex than external perceptions generally acknowledge. It is undergoing profound transformations, with significant differences emerging between generations, lifestyles and local contexts.

There are indeed numerous local challenges affecting some Fulani communities—including limited educational opportunities for young people, the spread of drug abuse in certain areas

and increasing socio-economic marginalisation. Individually these may appear minor, but together they feed what has become a much broader cycle of insecurity.

Many Fulani communities, particularly those that have long been settled in countries such as the Central African Republic, legally acquired land decades ago and consider themselves fully integrated into their respective national communities.

Within today's economy of conflict, however, many have themselves become victims of systems of predation controlled by criminal networks. Large numbers have sought refuge in neighbouring Chad.

Similarly, the authorisation granted in some contexts—notably under MINUSMA—to allow certain nomadic communities to carry arms for self-defence represents a highly problematic approach. Weapons intended for community protection frequently end up in the hands of armed groups or local warlords, thereby reinforcing rather than reducing insecurity.

Looking beyond conflict

A crucial question remains:

What happens after the fighting ends?

How can the fractured social mosaic be rebuilt?

Democracy remains central to any lasting solution because it offers the most effective framework for managing diversity peacefully. It provides mechanisms through which prejudice can be dismantled rather than transformed into permanent sources of conflict.

A regional challenge requiring regional solutions

An African summit devoted specifically to transhumance could help establish a shared understanding of current dynamics and identify African-led solutions based on solidarity and cooperation.

The underlying issue extends well beyond pastoralism itself.

It reflects broader structural transformations linked to insufficient economic modernisation and diversification.

Three interrelated pressures have become increasingly acute:

- growing scarcity of water resources;
- environmental degradation;
- and mounting pressures on agricultural land.

At the same time, labour productivity has not increased sufficiently, forcing the expansion of cultivated land.

Traditional transhumance corridors that existed fifty years ago have progressively disappeared.

Climate change has further intensified these movements.

Coastal populations are moving inland as shorelines retreat under rising sea levels, while populations from the Sahel increasingly migrate southwards towards wetter ecosystems and mangrove areas.

These demographic and ecological dynamics cannot be managed within national borders alone.

A comprehensive regional strategy is therefore indispensable.

Transhumant populations do not stop at administrative frontiers, and the same challenges extend across the entire Sahel, from the Atlantic to Sudan.

Recommendation 6 – RETHINKING THE QUESTION OF BORDERS

Africa's borders no longer adequately reflect contemporary demographic, economic and environmental realities.

Their original delineation was largely arbitrary. Yet experience has shown that reopening the question of territorial boundaries today would carry considerable risks.

The challenge, therefore, is no longer to redraw borders but to ensure that they are effectively governed in ways that reduce tensions and improve the lives of border populations.

Towards effective border management

Several African experiences demonstrate that pragmatic solutions are possible.

The Senegalese experience

Along the Senegal–Mauritania border, conflicts between herders and farmers have been significantly reduced through an integrated approach to border management.

Working under the authority of prefects and sub-prefects, local administrations jointly define grazing areas, agricultural zones and livestock transit corridors.

Formal agreements regulate the seasonal movement of herds by specifying entry points, authorised periods and designated grazing zones.

Livestock vaccination campaigns are organised regularly.

Cross-border dialogue mechanisms help maintain peaceful relations.

Cultural festivals, trade fairs and even marriages between communities on both sides of the border contribute to strengthening social cohesion.

Military authorities also cooperate closely through regular meetings and joint patrols conducted at least twice each year.

Representatives from each country participate in the other's Independence Day celebrations, reinforcing mutual confidence.

The Beninese experience

Benin has established an **Integrated Border Management Agency** specifically tasked with improving public services in frontier regions.

Its responsibilities include drilling boreholes, building schools, supporting market gardening activities and strengthening local economic development.

The underlying objective is to ensure that border populations feel fully connected to the state and benefit from effective public services.

Security hubs have likewise been established in strategic areas.

In parallel, officially recognised transhumance corridors have been mapped and widely publicised in order to reduce conflicts between farmers and pastoralists.

Preventive dialogue initiatives are organised several times each year in areas considered particularly vulnerable.

The principle of the inviolability of borders

The principle that colonial-era borders should remain unchanged after independence has become one of the cornerstones of African interstate relations.

Much criticism has rightly been directed at the borders drawn during the Berlin Conference, whose arbitrariness ignored both historical realities and, in many cases, basic geographical considerations.

Nevertheless, African leaders themselves came to regard the preservation of inherited borders as the wisest option, recognising that reopening territorial claims could have generated an endless succession of disputes and conflicts.

In practice, this principle has largely prevailed.

Since 1960, territorial changes have been exceptionally rare, limited essentially to Eritrea's independence, South Sudan's secession, and Morocco's incorporation of Western Sahara.

Attempts at secession have generally failed when they concerned resource-rich territories such as Katanga or Biafra.

Conversely, rebellions emerging from poorer regions—including Chad, Liberia and Sierra Leone—have generally sought control of the central state rather than territorial independence.

Over time, however, the very function of borders has evolved.

Within many contemporary political economies, borders increasingly define exclusive zones of political and economic rent extraction.

Those exercising state power often treat national territory as their exclusive sphere of influence—a domain from which resources may legitimately be appropriated, but beyond which their authority does not extend.

This perspective helps explain not only the cases mentioned above but also the repeated failures of political unions and federations, the slow progress of regional integration, the obstacles facing intra-African private trade, and many other institutional blockages that otherwise remain difficult to understand.

Recommendation 7 – MAKING REGIONAL INTEGRATION THE CORNERSTONE OF SHARED SOVEREIGNTY

As the discussion advances, one conclusion becomes increasingly evident: the most meaningful conception of sovereignty for Africa is that of **shared sovereignty through regional integration**.

In an increasingly interconnected world, sovereignty is not diminished by cooperation; it is strengthened through collective action.

Pooling strategic resources

Regional projects are essential if Africa is to achieve meaningful economic integration.

Countries should build on their respective comparative advantages in order to improve regional competitiveness, while establishing appropriate mechanisms for solidarity and compensation.

To date, however, this ambition has only been partially realised.

The cotton sector provides an instructive example.

The West African Development Bank (BOAD) succeeded in mobilising regional financial resources for the cotton value chain, while the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) identified the Sénoufo Triangle—spanning three countries—as the region's most suitable production area.

Yet this potential regional centre of excellence was never fully developed.

True regional integration requires countries to agree that one nation may gradually withdraw from producing goods for which it possesses no comparative advantage, while specialising in others where its competitiveness is stronger. Such arrangements naturally require compensation mechanisms and redistributive policies benefiting all participating countries.

This is the very logic of an integrated economic community.

The analysis developed in the previous section perhaps helps explain why such initiatives have struggled: where economic rents remain the dominant objective, difficult questions inevitably arise concerning who controls them and who ultimately benefits.

Yet, in today's highly competitive global economy, regional integration is no longer simply desirable—it has become indispensable.

A pragmatic approach to monetary integration

The Lomé Declaration proposed a particularly interesting West African approach by advocating the creation of a **common currency**, rather than an immediately **single currency**. Under this proposal, a common Eco would coexist with national currencies fluctuating within agreed exchange-rate bands.

Such an arrangement would allow gradual convergence while preserving sufficient flexibility to accommodate differing national economic conditions.

This approach closely resembles the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, commonly known as the "currency snake," which preceded the introduction of the ECU and ultimately paved the way for the euro.

The responsibility of African regional institutions

ECOWAS, CEMAC, the African Union and Africa's other regional institutions must fully recognise the diversity of their member states while strengthening their collective capacity to engage with major global actors such as the United States, China and the European Union.

Individually, African countries possess only limited leverage.

Collectively, they are far better equipped to address the challenges facing a diverse but united continent.

This, however, requires institutional reform.

Regional organisations themselves must evolve if they are to become genuine instruments of African sovereignty.

(See GIAF recommendations: *Integration or... Disintegration? Re-founding the Dynamics of Regional Integration in Africa.*)

Building practical forms of political cooperation

How can African countries work together more effectively in pursuit of common solutions?

Federal systems demonstrate that unity does not require uniformity.

The United States has pooled competencies in defence, citizenship, passports, diplomacy and foreign trade while leaving most other responsibilities to individual states.

India functions as a federal union composed of thirty-one states, more than 1,600 languages and numerous officially recognised religions.

A fully-fledged African federation remains, for the time being, an ambitious long-term aspiration.

A more realistic intermediate step would consist of developing intergovernmental compacts through which neighbouring countries cooperate on clearly identified strategic issues, defend common interests and progressively transcend the limitations imposed by existing borders.

Such arrangements have already demonstrated their effectiveness.

Former Chadian President Idriss Déby successfully coordinated security efforts with neighbouring countries by deploying approximately 4,000 troops to Mali, 3,000 to Niger, 3,000 to Cameroon and 4,000 to Nigeria.

Together, these joint operations reportedly destroyed nearly seventy per cent of Boko Haram's operational capacity.

Yet these forces were subsequently required to return to their respective countries in the name of narrowly interpreted national sovereignty.

The distribution of international security funding may also have contributed to this reversal.

Overall, experience strongly supports the idea that African sovereignty is more effectively exercised collectively than individually.

Countries such as Burkina Faso and Mali continue to confront cross-border insecurity.

Without rigid borders, efforts against armed groups could be genuinely pooled—as extremist organisations themselves already do.

Julius Nyerere once observed that the Maasai, like giraffes, recognise no political frontiers.

Yet excessive attachment to narrowly conceived state sovereignty continues to hinder deeper integration.

The realities of globalisation increasingly require Africa to organise itself within broader political and economic spaces.

Recommendation 8 – MAKING AFRICA AN ECONOMIC POWER

Discussions of sovereignty often focus primarily on political institutions.

Yet genuine sovereignty ultimately depends upon economic strength.

The central challenge can be summarised in three propositions.

First, lasting stability cannot exist without employment.

Second, the private sector constitutes the principal engine of sustainable job creation.

Third, employment cannot be generated at the scale required unless African countries pursue coordinated industrialisation strategies.

Transforming Africa into a genuine economic power therefore requires common industrial policies capable of creating integrated regional value chains, expanding productive capacities and strengthening competitiveness within global markets.

Economic sovereignty cannot simply be proclaimed.

It must be built through production, innovation, investment and sustained growth.

D – PROPOSALS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

1. A GENERAL MOBILISATION: FROM RHETORIC TO TANGIBLE IMPACT

Achieving genuine sovereignty requires moving beyond declarations of intent towards practical reforms.

A broad mobilisation is therefore needed:

- a)** to comprehensively review the legal, regulatory and fiscal frameworks governing economic activity across African countries, eliminating outdated provisions and replacing them with innovative rules designed to support entrepreneurship and productive investment;
- b)** to give decisive priority to technical education, vocational training, work-study programmes and apprenticeships, while strengthening cooperation between educational institutions and private industry so as to produce the skilled technicians required by modern economies and industrial development. This necessarily entails a profound reform of education legislation;

c) to establish fiscal systems that actively encourage domestic value addition by making locally processed products more competitive than imported manufactured goods through targeted incentives rather than punitive taxation.

Without such a **general mobilisation**, discussions of sovereignty risk remaining little more than political slogans disconnected from practical realities.

2. BUILDING A PAN-AFRICANISM ROOTED IN ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Africa's future depends upon developing a genuine industrial strategy that transcends national boundaries.

This requires coordinated action in several strategic areas.

a) Developing integrated regional energy systems by enabling countries with surplus production capacities to supply neighbouring states, thereby creating interconnected energy markets.

b) Designing common industrial, agricultural and energy strategies that fully respect national sovereignty while pursuing shared regional objectives.

c) Improving opportunities for Africa's youth by facilitating education, vocational training and academic mobility across the continent.

d) Defining a common African strategy for Artificial Intelligence, ensuring that AI systems reflect African realities while strengthening digital sovereignty and protecting data.

This will require substantial investments in data centres, engineering capacities, research, technical expertise and digital infrastructure.

Because most African economies remain relatively small when considered individually, such investments can only achieve sufficient scale through regional cooperation.

3. ALWAYS BUILD SOVEREIGNTY WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR "AT THE TABLE"

Sovereignty is necessarily a gradual process.

It is built over time through prosperity, productive economic activity and employment—the true foundations of stability and long-term transformation.

The private sector—including micro-enterprises, small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as much of the informal economy—must therefore occupy a central place within this process. Its capacity to drive development, however, depends upon the removal of the many obstacles that continue to constrain entrepreneurial activity.

These include unfair competition created by poorly regulated imports, tax systems that discourage productive investment, excessive administrative burdens, corruption, and numerous other governance failures.

Removing these constraints must become a strategic priority.

Regional integration itself should therefore be designed with **the private sector as a full partner**, rather than as a passive beneficiary.

This will require a profound **re-foundation** of certain public policies and regional institutions so that they consistently promote, rather than hinder, the development of Africa's domestic productive economy.

Concluding Reflection

Throughout these discussions, one central idea emerges with increasing clarity.

The question is not whether Africa should pursue sovereignty, but **what kind of sovereignty it seeks**.

A sovereignty understood merely as the formal exercise of state authority will remain fragile. A sovereignty rooted in democratic legitimacy, human capital, productive economies, cultural confidence and regional solidarity offers a far more promising path.

In an increasingly interconnected world, Africa's future influence will depend less on the assertion of isolated national sovereignties than on its collective capacity to transform diversity into strength, cooperation into power, and integration into genuine strategic autonomy.

Session 5

CONCLUDING SESSION

Without a genuine commitment to solidarity, Africa will be unable to address the challenges that lie ahead—particularly those arising from climate change. **The concept** that ultimately emerges as **the most relevant** is that of **shared sovereignty**: a sovereignty exercised collectively by states, territories and societies in pursuit of common objectives.

No sovereignty proclaimed in the absence of a solid economic foundation can be considered sustainable. Genuine sovereignty can only be built progressively through **openness, cooperation and co-construction with other African countries**, while remaining fully engaged with the wider world. Such sovereignty combines economic resilience with collective security and strategic autonomy.

Shared sovereignty, regional integration, political commitment and the pooling of resources—particularly in the fields of security and productive investment—thus emerge as **the essential pillars of Africa's future**. As G emphasised in his opening address to the conference, these are the conditions under which **"Africa can become the world's next manufacturing powerhouse."**

The vision is therefore that of an Africa that **rejects passive dependence** and enters the global arena more united, more self-confident and more determined: an Africa capable not merely of adapting to the emerging international order, but of **co-constructing it**.

At the same time, the conference recognised that current regional divisions—aggravated by externally fuelled conflicts and competing geopolitical agendas—pose a serious threat to this ambition. Africa's future will largely depend on the outcome of **this tension between, on the one hand, the aspiration for continental cooperation and shared development, and, on the other, the growing risks of fragmentation and conflict**, from which only the grey economy and transnational criminal networks stand to benefit.

Ultimately, the future of the world is inseparable from the future of Africa.

The continent has become one of the defining strategic issues of the twenty-first century—for better or for worse—and nowhere is this more evident than for its immediate European neighbours.

Both Africans and their international partners must fully grasp the significance of this historical moment, for **what is ultimately at stake is nothing less than the future of the generations** to come.