Synopsis | 21st Century Peace Work: Africa's Choice

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Over the last 8 years I have collected 156 interviews with scholars and practitioners of peace across the world for my study of the 21st Century Challenges to Peace. The project as a whole examines how participants define peace and peace work, what they report as the key challenges the field has faced over recent decades, the challenges they believe we will face over the coming decades, and what changes we must make now to address the challenges to peace we face in the long-term.

It will come as no surprise that those challenges are many. They include climate change and related challenges like food and water security, spiralling economic inequalities both domestically and globally, an erosion of faith in democracy and the rise of authoritarian modes of government, the declining influence and legitimacy of international 'order' and the United Nations, and technological innovation and issues related to the emergence of AI.

Further, while each of these challenges is substantial, the pivotal problem is that they are all also interrelated; interacting in complex ways that intensify the momentum of disruption. This is captured in the concept of the *polycrisis*.

But what does this mean for Africa as a continent?

First, while the countries and regions of the continent will experience the intensifying disruptions of the polycrisis differently, collectively they are impacted in ways distinct from other regions. Unlike Europe, North America, or East Asia, Africa as a whole has been structurally disadvantaged historically in ways that have increased its contemporary exposure to the challenges noted above. Further, in their efforts to insulate themselves from these challenges, powerful actors from other regions are intensifying their efforts to extract commitments and resources from African countries.

Second, just as the challenges of the polycrisis travel between continents, they also traverse borders. Political, economic, social, and environmental challenges will travel between states, increasingly making it difficult for any African country to isolate itself from disruptions. Just as is true for other continents, Africa has always been interconnected. But the implications of this will be ever more clear in an age of complex interconnected challenges where individual states will find it ever harder to insulate themselves and regions will succeed together or fail together.

This presentation will reflect on the findings from this project regarding the broad global challenges to peace, and the impacts they may have in Africa specifically. It will reflect on the relative strengths and weaknesses of Africa's geopolitical, economic, geographical, demographic, and climatic positioning vis-à-vis other regions with reflections from African participants in the project. The key purpose is to think through the choices African leaders have before them in what are set to be disruptive and destabilizing times. Specific questions that will be addressed include:

- Which of these coming challenges (if any) should Africa prioritize or focus its efforts on?
- How can Africa best coordinate responses to these challenges given constrained resources?
- What are Africa specific and Africa owned responses that can benefit the continent directly?
- What role has the African Union in leading or in coordinating Africa's response?
- How can other regional actors (RECs and RMs) contribute to this response?
- What role, if any, is there for external actors (states, corporations, funders, professionals)?