

Border governance: Support to the African Union Border Programme (AUBP)

Effective and sustainable border governance prevents conflicts between African states and promotes integration

The Challenge

Within the framework of decolonization, the independent African states took over the borders inherited from colonial times in order to prevent new conflicts from arising as a result of a revision. With a few exceptions, these borders still exist today, but for various reasons they remain a factor of uncertainty. Thus, colonial documents do not always describe a precise border line and the marking shows considerable deviations or is completely absent. Only a third of the borders in sub-Saharan Africa are clearly delimited and demarcated. In addition, social and economic factors were often ignored in the demarcation process, which still contribute to the emergence of local and interstate conflicts today. Conflicts at the local level can lead to violent escalation or serious disruption of interstate relations through the demand of local actors for the enforcement of border claims from below, or the mobilization of communities from above.

The African Union (AU) considers ill-defined borders as potential sources of conflict, especially when natural resources are discovered in the border regions. Such borders are a threat to peace and security, and they hinder regional integration, economic growth and development.

The Approach

In 2007, the AU launched the African Union Border Programme (AUBP) as a direct response to these risks. Clearly defined, internationally recognized and locally accepted state borders are an important basis for conflict prevention. Since 2008, the project has supported the implementation of the AU Border Programme at the continental, regional, national and local level.

Delimitation and Demarcation: The project supports selected AU Member States to better define their borders and to use improved planning and technical capabilities for joint border definition. The better definition of borders includes increasing



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the number (densification) and renewal of dilapidated border markings, as well as mapping border areas. It also includes the reform or creation of border commissions. Working with the local border communities to create awareness about the relevance of borders and to prevent conflicts is another important aspect to foster peace and security in the border regions.

Cross-Border Cooperation: The project works with border communities, civil society, local and state actors to implement cross-border cooperation projects at selected borders that are close to their needs and lives.

Strengthening the AU and RECs: The AUBP unit and selected RECs are strengthened in supporting border governance initiatives of their Member States. The project works with the AUC and the RECs to improve their capabilities to exercise their roles as norm developers, multipliers and coordination platforms. The project aims at increasing the added value of the AUC for the states and to further strengthen the AUBP unit as a pacemaker of the border governance agenda and multiplier of AU legal instruments and policies such as the Niamey Convention.



Photo on the left: A landmark along the border between Algeria and Niger that was densified in 2017 © GIZ

Photo on the right: Representatives of Burkina Faso and Mali laying a boundary stone © GIZ

**Valentin Schütz**

Head of Programme
valentin.schuetz@giz.de

Photo on the left: Building bridges through borders: Border crossing in Mozambique © GIZ

Photo on the right: A customs officer in the Kenyan-Tanzanian border area © GIZ

Results in figures ...

Significant progress has been made in recent years in better defining border lines on the African continent. With the support of the programme, more than 6,000 km of previously ill-defined borderlines were delimited and demarcated. In addition, five states have signed treaties regarding their boundary line: Comoros-Mozambique (2011), Seychelles-Tanzania (2012), Burkina Faso-Niger (2014), Côte d'Ivoire-Burkina Faso (2014), Namibia-Botswana (2017), Malawi-Zambia (2018)

In terms of the capacities of African actors, the programme has supported the publication of seven manuals, i.e. on the issues of conflict management in border areas, demarcation of borders, establishing border commissions, improving access to expertise and setting continental standards.

Border officers in 28 countries can now fulfill their roles more professionally and efficiently thanks to training in various areas of cross-border cooperation. For example, more than 200 health officials in Mali and Guinea have been trained in Ebola prevention, helping to contain the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. In Eastern Africa, the East African Community (EAC) has elaborated a curriculum for border officers working at one-stop-border-posts (OSBP).

In addition, norms and foundations of peaceful cooperation could be established and formalized under international law: 17 African States have meanwhile signed the AU Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation (Niamey Convention). In addition to the Niamey Convention, in 2020 the Assembly of the African Union has adopted the African Union Strategy for Better Integrated Border Governance (AUBGS) which serves as framework for border governance across the continent.

... and in stories

“In the past, people had to wait hours or even days at the border crossing because they had to go through the same process in Tanzania after completing their checks in Kenya,” says Dishon Njuguna, customs officer on the border between Kenya and Tanzania.

To facilitate a faster crossing of the border for persons and goods, Kenya and Tanzania introduced a new border control with the support of the project. The introduction of a “One Stop Border Post”, in which goods and persons are controlled only once by a team of Kenyan and Tanzanian officials, allows to pass the border much faster.

The opening of the One Stop Border Post (OSBP) intensified economic relations between the two countries. *“The new border post greatly facilitated the exchange of people and goods between Kenya and Tanzania. We operate day and night and allow 150 to 200 trucks a day and 1,500 people to cross the border,”* says Dishon Njuguna.

Issoufou Souley, 42, living in Saya in the South East of Niger: *“Without papers; I had to pay money to the police to cross the border between Niger and Nigeria. Now, with the new passport, I can visit my relatives in the neighboring country without corruption.”* Within the ECOWAS region, citizen from Member States can freely move, but due to the lack of birth certificates or travel documents, people were often forced to pay bribe to cross the border.

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In Cooperation with: African Union Commission (AUC)

Company's seat: Dag-Hammarskjöld Weg 1-5
D-65760 Eschborn
Germany
T: +49 (0)61 96 79-11 75
F +49 (0)61 96 79-11 15

On behalf of: German Federal Foreign Office

Authors: Esayas Abebe
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