

# From Barriers to Bridges

## Promoting Stabilisation and Peace at Borders in Africa

### The Context

Within the context of decolonisation, 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. Most of these borders still exist today, and they remain a factor of uncertainty. 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 170,000 km of boundaries in Africa are clearly delimited (legally defined) and demarcated (visibly marked, e.g. with boundary pillars on the ground). 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. Local conflicts can lead to violent escalation or serious disruption of interstate relations especially when natural resources are discovered in the border regions.

The African Union (AU) considers ill-defined or unclear borders as potential sources of conflict and commits to a progressive border agenda recognising the positive contribution of an integrated border governance approach to peace, security, integration, resource sharing, trade facilitation, as well as inclusive growth and sustainable development of borderlands.

### Our Approach

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

The support focuses on four areas of action, with the delimitation and demarcation being the focus of the project.

Project name	Border Governance in Africa – Support to the African Union Border Programme (AUBP)
Commissioned by	German Federal Foreign Office (AA)
Project region	African Union (AU) and selected AU Member States
Lead executing agency	African Union Commission
Budget	EUR 15.0 million
Duration	07/2023 – 06/2026

- Better delimitation and demarcation of borders:** The project supports selected AU member states to better define their borders using improved planning and technical capabilities for joint border definition. This includes increasing the number (densification) and renewal of dilapidated border markings, mapping border areas, as well as the reformation or creation of border commissions. Working with the local border communities to create awareness about the relevance of borders and process of delimitation and demarcation to prevent conflicts is another important aspect to foster peace and security in the border regions.
- Improved border governance, policies and strengthened institutions:** With the adoption of the AU Border Governance Strategy (AUBGS) in 2021, the AU has set the framework for harmonising and improving border governance on the continent. The project strengthens the AUBP unit and selected Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in supporting border governance initiatives of their member states, and works with the AU Commission (AUC) and 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 AU for the states and to further strengthen the AUBP unit as a pacemaker of the border governance agenda and driver of AU legal instruments and policies such as the Niamey Convention.



L. to r.: Pillar at the Kenya-Tanzania border,  
Ateker Community Leader



*L. to r.: Border crossing Democratic Republic of Congo-Rwanda, border pillar placed at the Burkina Faso-Mali border*

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- **Conflict prevention through dialog and cooperation at conflictive borders:** The project works with border communities, civil society, local and state actors to build trust between border communities through cross-border dialogue and cooperation projects, and reduce conflicts or tensions.

- **Strengthening synergies and knowledge transfer:** The project promotes cooperation with and between national, regional and international border actors and the further development of expertise through regional trainings and exchange formats to ensure synergies and a coherent border governance approach in Africa.

## Examples

- **Better defined borders pave the way for peace**

In 2023, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau took a vital step towards the better definition of borders by forming a joint border commission. The need for better definition of their shared border became evident as large gaps between boundary markers and unclear boundary lines had led to local conflicts over access to land. During a mission along the 350 km long border, the current boundary line was compared with the boundary line defined in colonial agreements. The ultimate objective of the two countries is an agreement that not only clarifies the boundary line, but also provides a legal foundation for resolving land disputes fostering stronger cross-border collaboration.

- **Border communities at the heart of border governance**

In 2023, the Ateker communities of the Kenya-Uganda-South Sudan tri-border region traveled to the Kenya-Tanzania border to learn about the benefits of well-defined borders and peaceful co-existence. They identified conflict triggers and committed to prevention and mitigation. As a result, there were no major conflicts reported in 2024, and a peace resolution was signed by local leaders to promote peace and development in the border area. The resolution showed the commitment of leaders and communities to work together to prevent and manage conflicts. An integrated approach to border governance can transform borders from barriers to conduits of stability, peace, and economic development.

## Benefits and Results

Since the support of AUBP in 2008:

- 9,000+ km of borders are better defined
- 4 RECS and 35+ countries have been supported in border governance
- 10+ Cross-Border Agreements have been signed
- 40+ joint cross-border activities by neighbouring countries have been implemented
- 13 AU member states ratified the Niamey Convention

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