

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, cross-border dialogue in Niger



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.

Benefits and Results

Since the support of AUBP in 2008:

- 8,000+ km of borders are better defined
- 4 RECS and 35+ countries have been supported in border governance
- 9 Cross-Border Agreements have been signed
- 35+ joint cross-border activities by neighbouring countries have been implemented
- 9 AU member states ratified the Niamey Convention

Examples from the Field

➤ Demarcation at the border Benin - Niger

A border stretch of Niger and Benin was subject of dispute which

led the two States to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) arbitration. After the ruling in 2005 the two countries have not been able to implement the ICJ ruling despite several deadly conflicts over the exploitation of natural resources. In order to support the enforcement of the ICJ ruling and resolve local disputes, the project started engaging the two countries in 2014. Security force training and confidence-building measures were implemented to address the conflicts. Additionally, a bilateral agricultural project was initiated in the conflict-prone border regions to promote cross-border cooperation, social cohesion, and peacebuilding. These initiatives contributed to structural conflict prevention and fostering peace in the border regions and led to the signing of the delimitation treaty in 2023. With this treaty their entire common boundary line is defined, and border-related conflicts are prevented.

➤ Borders become bridges: A peace caravan and benchmarking tour in East Africa

The East African Community (EAC), with support of the AUC and GIZ, organised a peace caravan and benchmarking tour to promote peaceful co-existence and cross-border cooperation. The caravan consisted of state experts and representatives of the Ateker border communities from the Kenya-South Sudan-Uganda tri-border region, who wanted to learn from the experience of the Maasai community of Kenya-Tanzania. The visit illustrated the use of cross-border cooperation for economic prosperity. Due to clearly defined boundaries in Kenya and Tanzania, the Maasai community could travel peacefully across borders, enhance their cross-border trade by using the cattle market, and thus, add value to the meat production of Kenya.

Published by

Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

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As of

May 2024

In cooperation with

African Union Commission
www.au.int

On behalf of

German Federal Foreign Office

GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.