Topic #1: Democracy & Governance

Africa has witnessed improvement in democratic governance since the late 1990s and early 2000. Indeed, efforts to promote good governance in Africa have been strengthened with provisions on democracy, rule of law and human rights enshrined in the charter of the African Union (AU) and the protocols of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) across the continent. This stride has been supported by assistance from the United States to several African states and through multilateral arrangements. However, since August 2020, there have been 10 successful coups in Africa in which governments have been overthrown by their own militaries. Coups occurred in Chad, Mali, Gabon, Niger, Guinea, Sudan, and Burkina Faso. Several resulted in the overthrow of democratically-elected governments.

They happened for a variety of reasons. Aside from Gabon, all affected nations rank near the bottom of UN's Human Development Index. They struggle with poverty and low levels of education and life expectancy. All of the nations also rank poorly in corruption, according to the Corruption Perceptions Index's global average. Many of the governments were broadly viewed as ineffective and serving themselves over their citizens. Furthermore, multiple nations have deteriorating security situations due to insurgencies by armed groups. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project reported that more than 530 violent incidents occurred between February and May 2022 in the Sahel region, showing a 115 percent year-on-year increase. The humanitarian situation also continues to worsen, with close to 2 million displaced people in Burkina Faso alone. The rate of severe food insecurity nearly doubled from 2021 to 2022, with over 600,000 people in emergency hunger levels during the 'lean season.' The AU Peace and Security Council has tried to promote cooperation among the new military governments and other governments in the region to address these issues, but the problem has continued to worsen.

Since the coups, the military governments have restricted civil and political liberties to consolidate their control, and no elections have been held. There has not been an effective continental response to the coups. Both the AU and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) issued statements condemning the military coups, also calling upon the military governments to restore constitutional order and democratic rule. ECOWAS took the most severe response by announcing sanctions and activating a standby military force to reverse Niger's recent coup. However, none of the coups have been reversed by domestic or external forces. In fact, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso recently stated their intention to pull out of ECOWAS.

The increase in coups directly contradicts the AU's stated objectives on democracy and governance. The AU supports democratic governance, free and fair elections, and civil and political liberties. The coups indicate that democratic backsliding is occurring in Africa. Some experts have argued that the August 2020 coup in Mali started a domino effect that encouraged subsequent coups in other nations. Many of the affected nations as well as other African nations face similar problems and widespread dissatisfaction among their populace. There are concerns within African nations and the international community that there will be more coups in previously unaffected nations. Absent an effective policy response from the AU, the potential for coups and further democratic backsliding remains high.

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Questions for Consideration
1. How can the AU address the complex security-governance-development crisis in the Sahel?
2. How can the AU contribute to safeguarding the rule of law, human rights and democratic governments in coup-afflicted nations?
3. What measures can be undertaken by the AU to prevent an undemocratic change of government in Africa?
4. What critical measures can be implemented to strengthen democracy and good governance on the continent?

Useful Resources
- "A Deeper Look Into the West African Coup Wave," by Daniel Baltoi, Foreign Policy Research Institute, January 9, 2023. https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/01/a-deeper-look-into-the-west-african-coup-wave/

- https://amaniafrica-et.org/briefing-on-the-situation-in-the-sahel-region-2/

- https://amaniafrica-et.org/update-on-some-countries-in-political-transitions-burkina-faso-chad-guinea-and-mali/

- "After the Coups, West Africa's Brexit Moment," by Emmanuel Akinwotu, NPR, January 31, 2024. https://www.npr.org/2024/01/31/1227863649/after-the-coups-west-africas-brexit-moment#:~:text=Mali%20went%20through%20two%20coups,the%20coup%20there%20last%20July.

- Kari M. Osland & Henriette U. Erstad (2020) The Fragility Dilemma and Divergent Security Complexes in the Sahel, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03932729.2020.1833474#2b85d6ca-6520-4a3d-8e4a-aa9f2ee3f33d-b6de7b7c-de82-45a5-9538-313dd15c6659

Topic #2: Natural Disasters and Humanitarianism
The 2023 devastating earthquake in Morocco and the tsunami-sized flash floods in Libya are the latest in a series of natural disasters that have hit Africa, thus highlighting obstacles to relief and disaster responses in Africa. On Sept. 8, 2023, a 6.8 magnitude earthquake struck southern Morocco, causing widespread damage in mountain villages. Similarly, three days after the incident in Morocco, an unusually severe Mediterranean storm caused two poorly maintained Libyan dams to collapse, resulting in massive floods across the port city of Derna. More than 3,000 people died due to the earthquake in Morocco, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The World Health Organization estimated nearly 4,000 deaths in the case of Libya, with another 10,000 missing, and more than 46,000 Libyans

displaced, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Before these occurrences, Cyclone Freddy, which made landfall in Mozambique as a Category 2 storm with 110 mph winds, resulted in floods that killed 1,434 people. Reportedly the deadliest tropical cyclone on record for Africa, surpassing Cyclone Idai of 2019, Freddy left 679 dead and 537 people missing in Malawi, with additional fatalities in Madagascar (17), Mozambique (198), Zimbabwe (2), and Mauritius (1). These casualties are unprecedented for natural disasters in Africa.

The World Meteorological Organization alluded that a huge death toll could have been avoided if Libya, a failed state for more than a decade, had a functioning weather agency and a central government. "The emergency management authorities would have been able to carry out the evacuation of the people… hence avoided most of the human casualties." While it was much easier to get international aid to Morocco, the government only accepted search and rescue teams from the UK, Qatar, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates, but refused offers of help from the United States, Tunisia, Turkey, Taiwan, and significantly France (its former colonial ruler). These scenarios highlight African states' poor capacities in disaster responses and relief coordination as many of the disasters remain unrecorded and unmitigated.

This calls to question the capacities of regional responses to natural disasters and humanitarian crises. The AU Humanitarian Policy Framework was formulated in 2015, and the foundation of its Framework is "anchored on the principles of International Humanitarian Law". The Framework's goal is to provide the AU and other humanitarian stakeholders with strategic guidelines to prevent, prepare for, and respond to humanitarian crises. Internally, the Framework entrusts the Humanitarian Affairs Division of the Department of Political Affairs with the mobilization of the "collective African Union response", in coordination with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the AU Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Refugees, Returnees, and IDPs. This includes pursuing actions to alleviate the plight of refugees, returnees, and internally displaced persons (IDPs), which means providing their immediate protection and needs as a result of man-made and natural disasters.

Given the abysmal experience in Libya and Morocco, the Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs, and Social Development of the African Union Commission (AUC) concluded the Eleventh Session of the AU Annual Humanitarian Symposium on 27 – 29 November 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya under the theme "Advancing Effective and Inclusive Humanitarian Action in Africa. The symposium focuses on strategic approaches to advancing effective and inclusive humanitarian action in Africa, as enabled by the commitments of the African Union Member States in the 2016 Common African Position on Humanitarian Effectiveness (CAP), the 2022 Malabo Declaration, and the Global Compact on Refugees. The establishment of the African Humanitarian Agency as Africa's institutional pillar in responding to forced displacements and disasters on the continent gives effect to the centrality of African States in humanitarian action on the continent and marks a significant development in shaping Africa's Humanitarian Agenda and Architecture. Given how these occurrences revitalized the discourse on natural disaster response and humanitarianism, the following issues can be pondered.

Questions for Consideration

1. In what ways can the AU and member states integrate humanitarian needs and displacement issues into national and local development plans to promote effective and inclusive humanitarian action in Africa?

2. How can Africa build effective disaster resilience to natural hazards in the regions, countries, and communities, considering the need for enhancing Country Risk Profiles for floods and droughts and data catalogs in Africa?

3. What roles can policymakers and practitioners from Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), donors, UN agencies, humanitarian organizations, and other stakeholders (including Think Tanks, Academia, Civil Society, Youth, Populations, the Diaspora, Innovators, social and the private sector) play in the review of humanitarian action in Africa and its implementation?

Useful Resources

-   "Libya and Morocco: two very different responses to catastrophe," by Rupert Neate with Peter Beaumont, The Guardian, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/15/libya-and-morocco-two-very-different-responses-to-catastrophe

-   "MedGlobal Responds to Unprecedented Earthquake in Morocco and Floods in Libya," UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). https://reliefweb.int/report/libya/medglobal-responds-unprecedented-earthquake-morocco-and-floods-libya

-   "Morocco's Earthquake and Libya's Floods Highlight Obstacles to Relief Efforts," by William Lawrence, September 21, 2023. https://www.american.edu/sis/news/20230921-moroccos-earthquake-and-libyas-floods-highlight-obstacles-to-relief-efforts.cfm

-   United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction Regional Office for Africa (UNDRR-Africa), Nairobi, Kenya, 2024. https://www.undrr.org/about-undrr-where-we-work/regional-office-africa

-   "The African Union's humanitarian policies: A closer look at Africa's regional institutions and practice," International Review of the Red Cross (IRRC) No. 920-921, November 2022, by Namira Negm. https://international-review.icrc.org/articles/the-african-unions-humanitarian-policies-920

-   "Five major weather disasters in Africa in 2023," by Slyvia Chebet, September 15, 2023. https://www.trtafrika.com/africa/five-major-weather-disasters-in-africa-in-2023-14974387