



OUTLOOK ON PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE HORN OF AFRICA: EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATION

RESEARCH PAPER

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The Institute for Strategic Insights and Research (ISIR) is an independent nonpartisan think tank dedicated to contributing to building democratic public institutions and pluralistic societies in the Horn of African countries.

ISIR seeks to inform decision-makers and drive change through policy-relevant research, dialogue, and training.

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INTROUDCTION

The Horn of Africa (HoA), a geographical belt comprising Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, is one of the most turbulent regions in the world.¹ In July 2021, the World Bank reported that the region harbours more than 2.7 million refugees and 6 million internally displaced people that have been subject to prolonged conflict, religious extremism, poor governance, and limited public services to support basic needs. Exasperating these pre-existing governance issues are large-scale environmental phenomena such as climate change which has caused droughts, famine, food scarcity and stifled economic growth with decade-long effects.² Much of the region's fragility is historically rooted in religious and ethnic conflicts dating back to pre-colonial times when religion and ethnicity were highly contested among diverse communities. The HoA countries' ill-defined borders have catalysed notable insecurity leading to high-intensity inter-state and civil wars, namely the Somalia-Ethiopia war (1977-1978),

the Badme War between Eritrea and Ethiopia (1998-2000), and several border conflicts since the early 2000s. Likewise, other countries in the region such as Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda have experienced bitter civil wars that led to regime changes.

These conflicts have consumed considerable human life and political attention resulting in state resources being diverted from development endeavours to war efforts. Due to its geostrategic significance beyond the post-colonial era, the HoA was caught in inter-state rivalry between Cold War superpowers that sought to establish influence in this strategic territory that faces oil-rich Middle Eastern lands and sits along a maritime chokepoint of global trade. The rise of non-state terrorist actors such as Al-Shabaab which have dominated contemporary conflict dynamics equally contribute to the complexity of the region.³ Between 2018 to 2019 alone, AOAV's explosive violence data revealed that Al-Shabaab was responsible for 83% of all civilian casualties in Somalia, 94% of which were targeted by Improvised Explosive Devices.

¹ Olika, T. 2008. "Conflicts and Conflict Resolution in the Horn of Africa: Toward the Study of Regional Peace and Security." *Ethiopian Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities* 1-2.

² The World Bank. 2021. *Responding to COVID-19 Across the Horn of Africa*. 7 July. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/07/07/responding-to-covid-19-across-the-horn-of-africa>.

³ Waal, Alex de. 2015. *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa – Money, War and the Business of Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Persistent civilian harm caused by non-state actors has undoubtedly been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic which has pushed the political and economic capacities of states in the HoA to their limit.⁴

Despite these socio-economic, security and political issues, geopolitical interest in the HoA signals an untapped opportunity. Rising urbanization and per capita income in the region have increased demand for high-value products, technology diversification and cross-border trade, with significant potential to augment entrepreneurship. These trends if cultivated strategically, could redefine production and consumption characteristics in the region whilst easing an unsustainable reliance on international trading partners for manufactured secondary goods.⁵ Furthermore, demonstrations of unprecedented regional cooperation such as the ‘Horn of Africa Initiative’ introduced by Finance Ministers from the HoA countries in October 2019 highlight a collective pathway towards solving challenges faced by the region whilst welcoming prospects for diplomatic cooperation. . In alignment with this vision, the ‘Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa’ was presented by State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on January 6th, 2022, during a press meeting with Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs Raychelle Awuor Omamo, in Mombasa.⁶

The initiative, inspired by a united vision of peace, seeks to support HoA countries in addressing the triple challenge of security, development, and governance, whilst providing synergies between the Belt and Road Initiative and Africa's development strategies. China has since appointed a Special Envoy, Xue Bing, for the Horn of Africa Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide the necessary support for this process.⁷

During a first visit to the region, Bing revealed China's intention to sponsor a first of its kind peace conference in the first half of 2022 in an attempt to resolve regional conflict.

The Institute for Strategic Insights and Research (ISIR) Think Tank has conducted a study that explores opportunities for closer cooperation within the HoA for the mutual benefit of promoting stability through the ‘Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa.’ This report provides two valuable propositions. Firstly, it offers critical insight into the measures required for progressive diplomatic engagement with external actors on the continent such as the People's Republic of China to further the economic development of the region. Secondly, it enables HoA policymakers to better manage prevailing opportunities and risks associated with the ‘Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa.’

⁴ Platts-Dunn, Louis. 2022. *Al-Shabaab and increasing civilian harm in Somalia*. 22 April. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/al-shabaab-and-increasing-civilian-harm-somalia>.

⁵ Bach et al. 2022. Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa. London: Routledge.

⁶ Nyabiage, Jevans. 2022. *China promotes peace conference for Horn of Africa nations*. January 7. Accessed May 6, 2022. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3162440/china-promotes-peace-conference-horn-africa-nations>.

⁷ Al-Awsat, Asharq. 2022. *China to Sponsor First Peace Conference in Horn of Africa*. March 3. Accessed May 6, 2022. <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3546541/china-sponsor-first-peace-conference-horn-africa>.

ISIR is an independent not-for-profit think tank dedicated to contributing to building democratic, pluralistic societies and effective public institutions in Somaliland and other Horn of Africa countries through policy-relevant research and analysis. ISIR seeks to encourage thoughtful debate and inform decision-makers on critical issues that matter to the public by providing relevant policy recommendations, research, and strategic analysis. We envision viable and peaceful states across the Horn of Africa committed to the principles of good governance where citizens enjoy their inalienable rights on equal footing without discriminatory grounds.

All candidates wished to remain anonymous for the purposes of this study. Primary research implemented in this report abides by ethical obligations of consent, confidentiality, and data protection.

1.1 Research methods

Methodologically, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data is employed in this report. Due to the recent and fast-evolving nature of the ‘Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa’ limited resources are available, therefore, this report leans heavily on recent local press releases and news websites for updates. Primary research is adopted by way of elite telephone interviews. Participants include Political Science Researchers with a special interest in the Horn of Africa region, United Nations Governance Consultants, and independent Advisors on China-Africa private sector developments.

1.2 Report Findings

i. Improve regionally coordinated security efforts: Home-grown regionally coordinated security efforts must be adopted by heads of state to address common governance issues including cross-border insurgency, extremist activity, and political/tribal unrest. There remains a space for light-touch support from Chinese security forces on methods to improve military, logistics and peacebuilding across the region to streamline defence and relief operations.

ii. Foster governance cultures of transparency and inclusion: HoA leaders must within their countries systematically engage with wide-ranging non-state actors that represent diverse pools of societal needs. There is scope for central governments to appoint civil society organisations to act as mediators assigned with the task of creating political spaces for peaceful disagreement, public accountability, and fair representation.

iii. Enhance fair, free and representative democratic processes: Political power, when held by a select few diminishes public accountability and opportunity for peaceful resolutions.

Creating more channels through which societal needs can be expressed will ensure central governments better prepare for looming unrest and thus implement preventative measures centred around meeting citizens' needs.

iv. Manage bilateral and regional affiliations that present diplomatic risks: It is necessary to analyse how China's engagement with the region affects prospects for stability given its diplomatic tension with Taiwan and parallels between Somalia and Somaliland. Additionally, there remain scholarly reservations surrounding Chinese projects that have been associated with widening socio-economic disparities in the region. If coordinated well, the Tripartite Agreement between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia could be expanded to include Kenya, Djibouti, and other countries, not only to avoid distrust amongst states but in a broader attempt to reinforce the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) so that it can effectively and more efficiently augment stability across the region.

v. Build inclusive infrastructure development: Projects such as the Mombasa-Nairobi and Addis-Djibouti railways must be inclusive and beneficial—not only for medium to large-scale businesses but for ordinary individuals in the HoA, particularly small-scale farmers given that official cross-border trade in the region is low compared to the volume of international trade.

vi. Modernise Horn of Africa local markets for trade: Incorporate secondary manufactured goods that could be traded regionally and internationally. The Africa Continental Free Trade Area provides a crucial opportunity to promote regional trade and manufacturing across nations to diversify economies away from primary commodity exports, establishing vibrant digital economies while pushing leading innovation throughout the wider continent. To this end, HoA states must harmonize trade policies and legal frameworks in a manner that is mutually beneficial for all parties involved.

vii. Embed agriculture in Horn of Africa development policies: There is a critical need to move agriculture forward in the HoA underlined by the region's fast-growing population which remains vulnerable to food insecurity, unemployment, and environmental degradation.

The region's concentration of unskilled labour indicates untapped opportunities in agricultural development and a space for locally grown climate change solutions to minimise environmentally driven humanitarian crises. Innovative and regionally coordinated agricultural policies must be explored amongst states to enhance food security and reduce absolute poverty.

1.3 Summarising Key Concepts

The Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa is both a political and physical entity which does not lend itself to a precise definition as the geographical extent of the region and countries within it have perpetually changed for decades. Not only is the Horn a geographic designation, but a cultural and socio-economic interconnected entity with distinguishable attributes from the level of economic development to territory and population size, natural resources, political ideology, and state structure.

. It is arguable though, that the state of affairs within and between countries in the region has reflected these differences more so than similarities. While many scholarly definitions include Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda, for the purposes of this paper the Horn of Africa ‘core countries’ will be defined as Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Eritrea as stipulated by the ‘Horn of Africa Initiative’⁸ and as defined by the World Bank in the 2021 report entitled ‘Horn of Africa Regional Economic Memorandum Background Paper 1: Economic Geography Analysis.’⁹ Throughout this paper, the expanded term ‘Horn of Africa’ and its abbreviated format, HoA, will be employed interchangeably.



⁸ Bach et al. 2022. *Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa*.

⁹ Bundervoet, Tom, and Takaaki Masaki. 2021. *Economic Geography Analysis. Horn of Africa Regional Economic Memorandum Background Paper No. 1*. Working Paper, Washington DC: World Bank.

The Horn of Africa Initiative

On October 18th, 2019, Finance Ministers of the five HoA countries — Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Eritrea issued a joint statement in which they stressed the “importance of regional, coordinated and concerted action among the countries to face common development challenges which are hampering their economic growth and poverty eradication efforts.”¹⁰ From this, the ‘Horn of Africa Initiative’ was born seeking to foster peace through the promotion of regional economic integration and sustainable development in the region.¹¹

The case for regional integration is embedded in the Horn’s geography, history, social and economic factors, with integration seen as a catalyst to accelerate the growth, economic diversification, and regional trade. To succeed in these pursuits, the HoA countries agreed on 4 thematic areas of priority: (i) Improving regional infrastructure connectivity by promoting transport, energy and digital connectivity; (ii) Promoting trade and economic integration; (iii) Building resilience to climate change and other shocks, including in the region’s borderland areas; (iv) Strengthening human capital development to boost skills and improve access to social services for the people of the HoA.¹²

Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa

To support the HoA countries in realizing long-term prosperity and stability, China recently proposed the ‘Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa,’ which was recently re-named as the ‘Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa.’¹³ Addressing the triple challenges of security, development, and governance,¹⁴ the initiative firstly aims to “strengthen intra-regional dialogue to overcome security challenges”¹⁵ whilst encouraging HoA countries to do away with unconstructive geographical competition. China has advised the regional countries to “hold a conference on peace in the Horn of Africa to conduct in-depth discussions on this issue, reach political consensus and coordinate common actions.”¹⁶ China has since appointed a Special Envoy, Xue Bing, for the HoA Affairs to support for this process.¹⁷

¹⁰ Horn of Africa Initiative. 2022. *The Horn of Africa Initiative*. 27 June. Accessed June 27, 2022. <https://hoainitiative.org/who-we-are/>. Pg. 1.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. 2022. *Ambassador Ma Xinmin Publishes Article Titled New Blueprint for Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa on Brown Land*. 11 April. Accessed June 15, 2022.

¹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People’s Republic of China. 2022. *Wang Yi Talks about the “Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa”*. 1 July. Accessed June 26, 2022.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People’s Republic of China. 2022. *Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Affairs of the Foreign Ministry Xue Bing Meets with Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kenya Macharia Kamau*. 1 March. Accessed June 26, 2022.

Secondly, the initiative seeks to accelerate developmental routes such as the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway and the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway which could be expanded into neighbouring countries, along with the Red Sea coast and East Africa coast being accelerated, “so as to form a development framework of two axes plus two coasts,”¹⁸ which would speed up the construction of what can be considered as an industrial belt and economic belt, with increased employment, growth and trading capacity.¹⁹

Thirdly, exploration of effective governance strategies will be addressed through organic home-grown methods which are specific to the ‘African way’. China supports solutions that are tailored to the national conditions in the HoA countries with the encouragement of shared experiences to overcome ethnic, religious, and regional governance bottlenecks, to create a “united, stable and harmonious development environment in the Horn of Africa.”²⁰

Section 2: Security and Governance in The Horn of Africa

The HoA is one of the most geo-strategically significant regions of the world owing to several factors, among many, its proximity to the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden,

and the Indian Ocean all of which are pivotal shipping routes connecting Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Moreover, the region has been key to international actors for maintaining accessibility to Gulf oil whilst ensuring maritime security, anti-piracy operations and anti-terrorism crusades. Competing foreign policy interests and inter-state rivalry have seemingly never left the region with countries like Britain, Italy and France paving a presence during the colonial period, the US and Soviet Union contending during the cold war and more recently Arab states, Western states and emerging powers like China seeking to build economic ties with HoA Countries.²¹ Security and governance dynamics within the region have been equally turbulent with Ethiopia and Sudan hosting some of the longest civil wars the world has seen. In Ethiopia, the civil war between the central government and Eritrean secessionists lasted for 30 years (1961-1991), similarly, Ethiopia and Somalia engaged in state-level conflict dating back to 1964, as “successive Somali governments objected to the demarcation of the 1,000-mile border with Ethiopia”²² drawn by colonial powers, leading to a “war over the Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia which is home to mainly ethnic Somalis,”²³ while Sudan saw two major conflicts ensue lasting 12 and 22 years consecutively.

¹⁸ China International Development Cooperation Agency. 2022. *Wang Yi Talks about the "Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa"*. 1 August. Accessed June 26, 2022. http://subsites.chinadaily.com.cn/cidca/2022-01/08/c_699765.htm.

¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China. 2022. *Wang Yi Talks about the "Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa"*.

²⁰ China International Development Cooperation Agency. 2022. *Wang Yi Talks about the "Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa"*.

²¹ Ylönen, Aleksi. 2022. “External Power Competition in the Horn of Africa: Somaliland’s Quest for International Recognition and Development.” *RUSI Journal* 74-82.

²² The Guardian. 2006. FAQ: *War between Somalia and Ethiopia*. 27 December. Accessed June 2, 2022.

²³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/dec/27/ethiopia>. Pg. 1.

²³ Ibid

These are just a few notable examples among many conflicts in the region.²⁴ Irrefutably, the Horn of Africa has been a stage for “interstate wars and civil wars; international military interventions and maritime piracy; genocidal massacres and non-violent popular uprisings. It has had three major territorial wars and three secessions”²⁵ causing lasting effects in the region.

Undoubtedly, the HoA’s governance and security dynamics present complex contemporary challenges.²⁶ Beyond illegal fishing and dumping on Somali coasts triggering a piracy epidemic, terrorism remains a pressing issue with violent actors like Al-Shabab and ISIS²⁷ targeting Somalia’s unstable central government and leaving dire humanitarian conditions for civilians on the ground.²⁸ There has been state-level destabilisation since Ethiopia’s invasion of Somalia in 2006 which exacerbated the rise of Al-Shabab and provoked an increasing number of attacks on Somalia’s federal government as well as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), with wider indiscriminate civilian attacks unleashed as recently as May 2022 at the site of Somalia’s presidential election.²⁹

Al-Shabab attacks have spilled into neighbouring countries like Kenya where civilians are systematically targeted.³⁰

On a macro level, according to records compiled by the independent research group known as the Armed Conflict, Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), more than 4,000 civilians have been killed by Al-Shabab since 2010 with many deaths taking place in Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, and Djibouti.³¹ Somalia’s governance progress was undoubtedly disrupted as a result, a notable example being the failure of political leaders to conduct presidential elections after former President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed’s (also known as Farmaajo) four-year term which expired in February 2021 with no designated successor to take his seat, leading to spiralled eruption of political turbulence in the country until Hassan Sheikh Mohamud’s election in May 2022.³²

Prominent regional bodies such as the European Union (EU) and African Union (AU) have highlighted that Somalia’s security and governance progress is highly dependent on the country’s ability to foster stable leadership while preventing Al-Shabab from exploiting societal divides and poor administration within-

²⁴ Ylönen, Aleks. 2020. “The Dragon and the Horn: Reflections on China–Africa Strategic Relations.” *Insight on Africa* 145-159.

²⁵ Waal, Alex de. 2015. *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa—Money, War and the Business of Power*. Pg. 37.

²⁶ Aftandilian, Gregory. 2022. *Horn of Africa’s Security Concerns and Economic Crises*. 27 April. Accessed June 26, 2022.

<https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/horn-of-africas-security-concerns-and-economic-crises/>.

²⁷ Organization for World Peace. 2022. *Islamic State In Somalia*. 25 May. Accessed June 2, 2022. https://theowp.org/crisis_index/islamic-state-in-somalia/.

²⁸ Center for Preventive Action. 2022. *Conflict with Al-Shabab in Somalia*. 2022 May. Accessed June 26, 2022.

<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/al-shabab-somalia>.

²⁹ Torelli, Chiara. 2022. *At Least Four Killed and Seven Injured in Al Shabaab Suicide Attack at Site of Upcoming Somali Presidential Elections*.

12 May. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/least-four-killed-and-seven-injured-al-shabaab-suicide-attack-site-upcoming-somali>.

³⁰ France24. 2022. *Several people killed in suspected Al Shabaab attack in Kenya*. 3 January. Accessed June 26, 2022.

<https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220103-several-people-killed-in-suspected-al-shabaab-attack-in-kenya>.

³¹ Maruf, Harun. 2020. *Al-Shabab Attacks Killed 4,000 in Past Decade, Says Data-Gathering Group*. 15 January. Accessed June 26, 2022.

https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_al-shabab-attacks-killed-4000-past-decade-says-data-gathering-group/6182660.html.

³² Al Jazeera. 2022. *Somalia set to hold overdue presidential election*. 14 May. Accessed June 26, 2022.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/14/somalia-to-hold-overdue-presidential-election-on-may-15>.

central government.³³ Left unchecked, violent extremists will continue to put the HoA at increased political, humanitarian, and economic risk.

Although inter-state conflict has simmered down notably in the HoA over the past decade, this remains a ceaseless threat to peace and security. Brewing low-level conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan regarding the disputed border at al-Fashqa (which lacks clear demarcation lines) is a key example of a highly complex cross-border tension that remains unresolved. Sudan's al-Fashqa region which covers approximately 600 km has been subject to ongoing disputes resulting in ethnic Amhara and Tigrayan militias from Ethiopia staging incursions, raids, and indiscriminate attacks on Sudanese farmers and security forces.³⁴ Responding to the increased frequency of Ethiopian attacks, "in March 2020, for the first time in nearly 25 years, Sudan deployed its troops along the al-Fashqa border strip."³⁵ The situation was worsened by the November 2020 Tigray war and remains perilous with Human Rights Watch reporting evidence of "Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone" in April 2022.³⁶ Intra-state conflict in the HoA is equally problematic. Djibouti has seen tensions rise between two ethnic groups—the Issa of Somali origin and the Afar of Ethiopian origin—

and the Afar of Ethiopian origin leading to violent clashes in January 2021 at Adaytu village where a reported 70 police officers were killed and 64 injured.³⁷

Unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic also exacerbated pre-existing governance strains within the HoA. The largest state in the region and second most populous country in Africa, Ethiopia, underwent notable governance disruptions when parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for August 2020 were postponed leading to what many believed was a constitutional crisis creating "intense political and legal disputes over whether the incumbent had the legal right to postpone the elections, followed by exchanges of various threats between incumbents and opposition groups"³⁸ which finally led to a disastrous war between Ethiopia and the TPLF. Although domestic politics in states such as Djibouti, Kenya and Eritrea were comparatively less affected by COVID-19, the role of the 'Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa,' remains critical in responding to residual governance failures during the pandemic.

³³ United Nations: Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. 2022. *Peaceful Transfer of Power in Somalia Offers Long-Awaited Opportunity to Advance Urgent National Priorities, Special Representative Tells Security Council*. 23 May. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14900.doc.htm>.

³⁴ Rhodes, Tom. 2021. Horn of Africa: Tigray and Further Tensions Between Sudan and Ethiopia. 31 January. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/tigray-and-further-tensions-between-sudan-and-ethiopia-29053>.

³⁵ Pangea Risk. 2021. *Special Report: Prospects of Another War in the Horn of Africa*. 8 January. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.pangea-risk.com/special-report-prospects-of-another-war-in-the-horn-of-africa/>. Pg.1.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch. 2022. *We Will Erase You from This Land: Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone*. 6 April. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/04/06/we-will-erase-you-land/crimes-against-humanity-and-ethnic-cleansing-ethiopia>. Pg. 1.

³⁷ Przygoda, Michał. 2021. Djibouti. Ethnic conflict hinders the country's development. 16 September. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://warsawinstitute.org/djibouti-ethnic-conflict-hinders-countrys-development/>.

³⁸ Hauge, Jostein, Goitom Gebreluel, and Michael Woldemariam. 2020. COVID-19 in the Horn of Africa: Political and Economic Impacts. 16 September. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/internationalrelations/2020/09/16/covid-19-in-the-horn-of-africa/>.

Section 2 Conclusion and Recommendations

The proposed ‘Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa’ has maintained that regional cooperation, economic integration, security, and governance resolutions remain key to the overall recovery and developmental efforts in the HoA. A key pillar of the initiative is to “strengthen intra-regional dialogue to overcome security challenges” with accompanying suggestions to “hold a conference on peace in the Horn of Africa to conduct in-depth discussions on this issue, reach political consensus and coordinate common actions.”³⁹ China appointed a Special Envoy, Xue Bing, to facilitate these efforts; encouraging home-grown solutions in an ‘African way.’ One of many actions could be taken to support the realisation of these goals.⁴⁰ This research paper determines that the region would benefit from 1) improved regionally coordinated security efforts 2) a governance culture of transparency and inclusion 3) enhanced democratic processes.

First, home-grown regionally coordinated security efforts must be adopted by heads of state in the HoA. Arguably, there has been a more concerted effort from external international and multi-lateral actors to stabilize the region from the outside than there has been internally.

Djibouti for instance, due to its strategic location remains the only HoA country in which US, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese and Chinese military forces have been stationed simultaneously, and security activities in the wider region primarily fall subject to competing foreign powers driven by defence diplomacy.⁴¹ However, pressing governance issues that affect millions of people such as cross-border insurgency, extremist activity and political unrest have treacherous local impacts that require regionally driven localised solutions. To help sustainably remedy these issues, China must deepen its understanding of local politics, societies, and cultures across HoA countries to better understand the root of existing security and governance issues and to enhance its preparedness to facilitate peace and security talks in a culturally sensitive and contextually relevant way. Much like the west, China may not necessarily offer governance solutions to HoA domestic problems, but there remains a space for light-touch advice from Chinese security forces on methods to improve military, logistics and peacebuilding training across the region to streamline defence and relief operations; ensuring that HoA countries commit to intelligence

³⁹ Ayferam, Gashaw , and Zelalem Muchie. 2016. “The Advent of Competing Foreign Powers in the Geostrategic Horn of Africa: Analysis of Opportunity and Security Risk for Ethiopia.” *International Relations and Diplomacy* 787-800.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ayferam, Gashaw , and Zelalem Muchie. 2016. “The Advent of Competing Foreign Powers in the Geostrategic Horn of Africa: Analysis of Opportunity and Security Risk for Ethiopia.” *International Relations and Diplomacy* 787-800.

sharing and coordinating responses against common governance threats such as pirates, terrorist, and rebel groups.

Second, a governance culture of transparency and inclusion must be fostered. HoA leaders must within their countries systematically engage with African experts, research scholars and civil society representatives on topics related to conflict resolution, ethnic tension and inclusion, early warning signals and peacekeeping amidst crises thereby creating an ecosystem for inter-communal political dialogue, which in turn generates inter-communal trust. Furthermore, there is scope for central governments to appoint civil society organisations to act as mediators assigned with the task of creating political spaces for peaceful disagreement, public accountability, and fair representation of all ethnic groups. On a wider level, a national peace forum comprised of community leaders within HoA countries could be created as a means of fostering transparency while ensuring that populations can demand the accountability of their leaders. An array of non-state actors such as religious heads, women and youth non-governmental organizations or academic scholars can play pivotal roles in diffusing societal tension whilst ensuring that the needs of citizens are embedded into state planning and policymaking.⁴²

Third, democratic societal characteristics are pivotal for enduring peace. Political power, when held by a select few diminishes public accountability and opportunity for peaceful resolutions thus increasing the likelihood of a call to arms by rebel groups, militias, and criminal networks. While these illegitimate actors create societal unrest, breach international law, and promote illegal economic activity which must be curtailed, “they are often the expression of social problems because they see themselves as representatives of distinct interests and may build on broad support within communities.”⁴³ Creating more channels through which societal needs can be expressed will ensure that central governments better prepare for looming unrest and implement preventative measures centred around meeting citizen’s needs. The current environment in the HoA, however, is far from democratic. A Political Science Researcher with specialist expertise in the Horn of Africa region who wishes to remain anonymous in this study, when interviewed stated:

⁴² Bach et al. 2022. *Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa*.

⁴³ Hofmann, Claudia, and Ulrich Schneckener. 2011. “Engaging non-state armed actors in state- and peace-building: options and strategies.” *International Review of the Red Cross* 603-621 pg. 604.

“All the countries are making progress apart from Djibouti and Eritrea which are lagging. If there were new leadership in these countries that embraced democracy, then there will be greater prospects for success. When there are similarities between the type of governments in the HOA, the likelihood of proposals such as the Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa succeeding increases.”

Djibouti’s President, Ismail Omar Guelleh, has been in office since 1999 and is not subject to term limits. Although Djibouti technically has a multiparty political system, the ruling Union for a Presidential Majority (UMP) uses authoritarian means to maintain dominance; severely constraining the opposition’s ability to operate.⁴⁴ “Journalists and activists who air criticism of Guelleh or the UMP are regularly harassed or arrested,”⁴⁵ much like in Eritrea, a militarized authoritarian state that has not held a national election since independence from Ethiopia in 1993 and is ruled by The People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), the sole political party headed by President Isaias Afwerki. Independent media outlets were shut down by the government in 2001 leaving only state-sanctioned newspapers and broadcasters, and citizens are required to perform national service often indefinitely.⁴⁶

For instance, Human Rights Watch researchers found that “many Eritreans spend their entire working lives at the service of the government in either a military or civilian capacity”⁴⁷ and the Global Slavery Index estimated that 93 out of every 1,000 citizens experience a form of modern slavery in Eritrea, which it ranked second-worst in the world.⁴⁸

Ethiopia does not fall far behind Eritrea’s governance deficiencies. The country is led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed who pledged to reform Ethiopia’s authoritarian leadership following a transition from The Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) via more open elections and liberalised policies,⁴⁹ however, “Ethiopia remains beset by political factionalism and inter-communal violence, abuses by security forces and violations of due process are still common, and many restrictive laws remain in force.”⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Freedom House. 2022. *Freedom in the World 2022*: Djibouti. 1 June. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/djibouti/freedom-world/2022>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ BBC News. 2018. *Eritrea country profile*. 15 November. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13349078>.

⁴⁷ Ashford, James. 2019. *Indefinite conscription: why so many people are fleeing Eritrea*. 19 August. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.theweek.co.uk/102761/indefinite-conscription-why-so-many-people-flee-eritrea>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Pilling, David, and Andres Schipani. 2020. *How Ethiopia’s Abiy Ahmed went from man of peace to a leader at war*. 6 November. Accessed June 26, 2022.

⁵⁰ Freedom House. 2022. *Freedom in the World 2022*: Ethiopia. 1 June. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2022>. Pg. 1.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed continues to struggle with prevailing ideological differences and forces from the country's old regime which was intent on recapturing the hegemonic economic and political influence it once held.⁵¹

Somalia made notable progress in May 2022 after the long-awaited presidential election took place which voted in Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as the country's 10th President following delays that heightened political tensions.⁵² On May 2022, James Swan who heads the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) urged Somali leaders to embrace "a spirit of collaboration and national purpose"⁵³ whilst observing shortcomings in the election process which saw Somalis deprived of a chance to vote for the House of the People in a one-person-one-vote election—essentially meaning "only a few thousand people voted for a parliament that would represent the nation of around 16.3 million"⁵⁴ and "only 21% of the elected Members of Parliament (MPs) were women, despite a 30% quota."⁵⁵

Kenya on the other hand has held regular multiparty elections since 1991 and is set to elect a new President on August 9th, 2022.⁵⁶

However, as the examples above demonstrate, elections do not equal democracy. Pervasive corruption, vote-buying, and security force brutality remain serious problems for the country. Much like other nations in the HoA, journalists and human rights defenders raising awareness of these issues remain vulnerable to inhumane laws and intimidation. Variations of 'democracy' exist beyond the prototype often modelled by Western governments, however, even in its most reductive form scholars and practitioners agree that the presence of fair, free and representative practices must exist. In an election system, this may include full adult suffrage, access to reliable information, freedom of the press, freedom of speech and an absence of state intimidation—all of which fall short in the countries mentioned above signalling critical areas of focus for the 'Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa.'⁵⁷

In assessing governance dynamics, it is necessary to analyse how China's engagement with the region affects prospects for stability. China's Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa Xue Bing spoke during the first China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance and Development Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on June 20, 2022, where he stated Beijing is ready to help the region's countries find peace and eliminate external interference.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Melesse, Kassahun. 2020. Tigray's War Against Ethiopia Isn't About Autonomy. It's About Economic Power. 19 November. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/11/19/tigray-tplf-war-against-ethiopia-abyi-ahmed-isnt-about-autonomy-its-about-economic-power/>.

⁵² Hujale, Moulid. 2020. Somalia edges closer to first democratic election in half a century. 24 February. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/24/somalia-edges-closer-to-first-democratic-election-in-half-a-century>.

⁵³ UN News: Global Perspective, Human Stories. 2022. International community urged to support new administration in Somalia. 23 May. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1118852>.

⁵⁴ Ali, Mohamud. 2022. Somalia's elections - where the people don't vote. 14 April. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-61083959>.

⁵⁵ UN News: Global Perspective, Human Stories. 2022. International community urged to support new administration in Somalia.

⁵⁶ Otieno, Jeff. 2022. Kenya 2022: What to expect in this year's most competitive elections. 21 June. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.theafricareport.com/215033/kenya-2022-what-to-expect-in-this-years-most-competitive-elections/>.

⁵⁷ Sklar, Richard L. 2016. "Democracy in Africa." *African Studies Review* 11-24

⁵⁸ Athumani, Halima. 2022. China Says It Is Willing to Help End Conflict in Horn of Africa. 20 June. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-says-willing-to-help-end-conflict-in-horn-of-africa/6625215.html>

Xue noted that turbulence and division across the region are on the rise, along with a resurgence of the Cold War power politics mentality, while peace and development are being met with resistance.⁵⁹ Although these concerns are valid, controversial risks, are equally associated with China's involvement with the region and proposition of the 'Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa. In the realm of politics, a United Nations Governance Advisor specialising in the Horn of Africa and serving as an interview participant for this study believes "the contentious issue between China and Taiwan (One-China policy) could be played out in Africa, because for example, China already views Somalia as the true legitimate government." Somaliland and Taiwan, both unrecognised states internationally, intensified bilateral diplomatic relations recently given their contested territorial status with neighbours—Somalia and China.

February 2022 saw a delegation from Somaliland attend a five-day tour of Taiwan, a visit denounced by China.⁶⁰ Making a statement to journalists at a press conference in February 2022 regarding the visit, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian accused Taiwan of "fanning the flames to undermine the independence and unification of other countries,

harming others without benefiting themselves." For Somaliland, Taiwan could be a major factor to exclude it from participating in the outlook. Complex geopolitical dynamics like these and what it means for the entire region must be carefully considered by heads of state within the 'Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa.' Furthermore, Somaliland's legal and diplomatic de facto status of more than 30 years if excluded from regional discourse presents a perpetual threat to peace and security with an ongoing possibility of territorial integrity.

Beyond the complexities of China's involvement as an external actor in the region, internally driven regional developments like the Tripartite Agreement between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia signed in September 2018 present risks for integration. If caution is not exercised, the agreement could breed distrust amongst excluded states, particularly HoA heads of state in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).⁶² The IGAD for instance, contains robust security and counter-terrorism programmes which the Tripartite Agreement, amongst other priorities, seeks to address.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Mureithi, Carlos. 2022. "We were born free, and we will stay free": Somaliland is resisting pressure from China. 16 February. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://qz.com/africa/2129165/why-china-and-somaliland-are-beefing/>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Demissie, Selam Tadesse. 2020. *Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia's new alliance must complement existing structures and not exacerbate distrust and undermine integration*. 24 March. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/is-another-regional-alliance-what-the-horn-needs>.

Increased communication and information sharing thus must be encouraged amongst these alliances to avoid unnecessary speculation or competition.⁶³ Questions will undoubtedly continue to arise regarding how the new alliance will relate to and collaborate with IGAD in a way that does not overlap mandates—a recommended topic for discussion amongst representatives of the ‘Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa’ to minimise risks of weakened regional cohesion. The HoA requires robust regionally coherent blocs that complement and strengthen its ability to realise common goals whilst protecting and negotiating the interests of its 141 million citizens. It is important that motives such as the ‘Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa,’ the Tripartite Agreement and the IGAD, are embedded into wider ongoing development plans in the region to harmonise cooperation between these inter-dependent countries in a streamlined fashion given their shared economic, security and social issues. If coordinated well, the Tripartite Agreement could reinforce the IGAD to augment stability in the region.

Section 3: Development dynamics in The Horn of Africa

Why is economic growth a fitting measure of developmental progress in the HoA? The Department for International Development’s working paper on ‘Building Jobs and Prosperity in Developing Countries’ captures it best, insisting that growth can generate enduring prosperity and skills-based opportunity.⁶⁴ Economic growth is often considered a benchmark for success because it fosters fertile ground for expanding incomes and employment, as well as the resources needed by governments to finance programs for socio-economic elevation.⁶⁵ However, millions of people in the HoA live in dire poverty. Poverty itself is a broad concept which has expanded over time exceeding one-dimensional measures usually based solely on income. . Rather, the Multidimensional Poverty Index, developed in 2010 by the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) alongside the United Nations Development Programme, supplements monetary measures by integrating various deprivations such as inadequate healthcare, limited education, poor living standards, environmental scarcity, and community disempowerment.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Department for International Development, UK (DFID). 2008. *Growth: Building jobs and prosperity in developing countries*. National government publication, London: Department for International Development, UK (DFID).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). 2022. *Policy – A Multidimensional Approach*. 26 June. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://ophi.org.uk/policy/multidimensional-poverty-index/>.

The COVID-19 Pandemic undoubtedly increased poverty levels across the entire continent. The United Nations Conference on Trade (UNCTAD) issued a press release on December 8th 2021 stating that “the 2021 poverty head-count rate (at \$1.90 purchasing power parity (PPP)/day) is estimated to have increased by three percentage points because of the pandemic compared to pre-COVID-19 estimates of poverty levels in 2021”⁶⁷ and “while in 2019, 478 million people lived in extreme poverty, it is estimated that in 2021, 490 million people in Africa live under the poverty line of 1.90 PPP\$/day.”⁶⁸

Specifically, within the HoA, applying US\$1.90 per day as the poverty line, Sudan and Djibouti are reported to have the lowest poverty rates in the region falling below 26% while Somalia and Eritrea’s poverty rate was around 60% in 2019 making these the poorest countries in the HoA.⁶⁹ Poverty in Somalia and Eritrea is not only rampant but highly gendered with women and girls receiving less access to necessary healthcare, education and skills development resulting in stifled economic emancipation. Women and girls in these countries, due to cultural and religious constraints, are usually excluded from employment and access to income.

School enrolment for girls and boy is a significant issue in the region due to recurrent droughts, famine, mandatory inscription in service of governments (youth service) and extremist conflict.⁷⁰ Despite being the largest country in the region, Ethiopia remains the poorest with nearly 30 million people living in extreme poverty worsened by conflict in the Tigray region. Exasperating these conditions are Ethiopia’s fast-growing young population, much like Djibouti where half of the population is younger than 25 years of age. A youthful population structure coupled with constrained socioeconomic opportunities contribute to the instability experienced in the region. Many youths, therefore, turn to the pastoral and agriculture sector for sources of income.⁷¹

Agriculture forms the backbone of many economies in the Horn, in fact, the region hosts the largest demographic of nomadic pastoralists in the world. For example, Somalia’s annual exports exceed 50 million livestock and about 1.8 million tons of fish.⁷² Crop and livestock farming remains the main source of economic activity accounting for roughly 75% of GDP and 93% of exports.⁷³

⁶⁷ UNCTAD Communications and Information Unit. 2021. *Economic Development in Africa Report 2021: Reaping the potential benefits of the African Continental Free Trade Area for inclusive growth*. 8 December. Accessed June 21, 2022. <https://unctad.org/press-material/facts-and-figures-7>. Pg. 1.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Yeboua, Kouassi, and Jakkie Cilliers. 2021. *Development prospects for the Horn of Africa countries to 2040*. Official report, Sweden: Institute for Security Studies.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). 2019. *Somalia: A fragile state with great potential for agricultural transformation*. 5 November. Accessed June 25, 2022. <https://agra.org/somalia-a-fragile-state-with-great-potential-for-agricultural-transformation/>.

⁷³ Yeboua, Kouassi, and Jakkie Cilliers. 2021. *Development prospects for the Horn of Africa countries to 2040*.

The current Somalia National Development Plan (2020–2024) places agriculture at the centre of its poverty reduction efforts with a focus on investing in technology and skills.⁷⁴ Similarly, in Sudan, agriculture is the primary economic sector contributing 25% to the GDP and employing about 80% of the workforce. However, the sector is undeveloped facing several challenges such as climate change, food insecurity and natural disasters which impede crop and livestock production leading to an overreliance on the importation of food.⁷⁵ For example, Djibouti has the biggest food deficit in the region; importing up to 90% of foodstuffs while Somalia “has a systemic and large trade deficit which is estimated at over 70% of GDP per annum”⁷⁶ as a result of the country’s high dependence on food imports originating from chronic crop deficit. To dilute dependence on popular trading partners like China and Gulf nations, local economies within the HoA must advance and build long-term resistance to environmental shocks.

A key indicator of economic development in any country is infrastructure and transport sectors. In the HoA, these assets can enhance the trade of agricultural goods which populations are heavily reliant upon.

Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasised a need to accelerate and expand the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway and the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway with a view to developing the Red Sea coast and East Africa coast so as to form a framework of “two axes plus two coasts”⁷⁷ which will create employment and improve independent development capacity.⁷⁸

these mega projects undoubtedly present opportunities for the region. Worth \$3.8 billion, the 300-mile-long Mombasa-Nairobi line along with the 450-mile-long Addis-Djibouti line costing around \$4 billion has certainly boosted productivity.⁷⁹ For instance, James Siele, Kenya Railways Business, Commercial & Operations Expert-Team leader, reportedly stated that “SGR passenger trains and freight trains had transported 7.78 million passengers and 18.8 million tons of bulk cargo respectively along the Mombasa-Nairobi corridor in the last five years.”⁸⁰ The benefits of the railway projects to African countries include enhanced efficiency and productivity which increases employment and economic growth.⁸¹

It is important to note however that Chinese financing supported the ability of these countries to fund these projects, for example, the “Mombasa-Nairobi line was funded 90 per cent by a loan from the Exim Bank of China

⁷⁴ Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). 2019. *Somalia: A fragile state with great potential for agricultural transformation*.

⁷⁵ Yeboua, Kouassi, and Jakkie Cilliers. 2021. *Development prospects for the Horn of Africa countries to 2040*.

⁷⁶ Ibid 22.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China. 2022. *Wang Yi Talks about the "Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa"*. Pg. 1.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China. 2022. *Wang Yi Talks about the "Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa"*.

⁷⁹ Sun, Yun. 2017. *China and the East Africa railways: Beyond full industry chain export*. 6 July. Accessed June 25, 2022.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2017/07/06/china-and-the-east-africa-railways-beyond-full-industry-chain-export/>.

⁸⁰ The State Council Information Office of China (SCIO). 2022. *Chinese-built SGR embedded in Kenya's quest for economic renewal, railway official says*. 30 May. Accessed June 26, 2022. http://english.scio.gov.cn/beltandroad/2022-05/30/content_78243810.htm.

⁸¹ Ibid.

and 10 per cent by the Kenyan government. In the case of the Addis-Djibouti line, 85 per cent of the Ethiopia portion and 70 per cent of the Djibouti portion were funded by loans from the Exim Bank of China.”⁸² A World Bank Researcher investigating China-Africa private sector projects wishing to remain anonymous for the purposes of this study, stated that “there has been a lot of debt gathered by these African countries, when you look at debt vs GDP they are heavily indebted...although I think China is realising that debt is an issue and that there must be more realistic expectations on both sides.

On the other side regarding the issue of debt on China investment in Africa scholars have developed conflicting opinions. The London based “debts justice”⁸³ which investigated African countries’ external debts and who is owed analysed World Bank data⁸⁴ followed by a publication of a study arguing that Africa owes more debt to Europe and America than China genuineness. It went on to conclude that most of African countries’ external debt is owed to western multilaterals institutions with a ratio of 35% compared to 12% owed to Chinese public and private companies.

Section 3 Conclusion and Recommendations

In light of these challenges, several areas of focus and partnership must be prioritised to support the ‘Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa’ in stimulating long-term inclusive growth as desired. This paper determines the following areas as topics of priority that must be analysed by representatives and stakeholders of the ‘Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa’, the region would benefit from 1) more inclusive infrastructure developments; 2) modernised markets for trade and 3) embedding the agriculture sector in HoA development policies.

First, projects like the 300-mile-long Mombasa-Nairobi line and the 450-mile-long Addis-Djibouti line must be inclusive and beneficial not only for medium to large-scale businesses but for everyday individuals in the HoA such as small-scale farmers in rural Ethiopia.

⁸² Sun, Yun. 2017. *China and the East Africa railways: Beyond full industry chain export*. Pg. 1.

⁸³ Who-African-governments-debt-is-owed-to_Media-Briefing_07.22.pdf

⁸⁴ International Debt Statistics | DataBank (worldbank.org)

Given that official cross-border trade in the region is low (compared to international trade) and over 95% of cross-border trade tends to be informally carried out by pastoralists trading livestock like cattle, camels, sheep and goats, easy access to infrastructure like the Mombasa-Nairobi line and the Addis-Djibouti line is pivotal for enhancing the local economy.⁸⁵ However, research shows that privileged groups with sufficient access to economic resources experience disproportionate benefits over disadvantaged groups.⁸⁶ The Mombasa-Nairobi railway development in Kenya is particularly “for those who regularly travel between Mombasa and Nairobi for work, business or leisure. As the new railway is more efficient than long and exhausting bus trips or expensive flights, these groups are directly benefiting from the new railway line. Rural populations still prefer to use bus and minibus services that offer more flexibility.”⁸⁷ For these groups, the railway presents challenges as it blocks several informal travel and access routes, “sometimes even dividing family land and splitting villages.”⁸⁸ This sentiment is reinforced by an interviewed participant—a doctoral researcher and independent Consultant on China-Africa private sector infrastructure developments in the HoA, who insisted that:

“A local farmer may find it hard to access the Djibouti railway as this is a large project and there is no soft infrastructure created along with these developmental projects, so a coffee farmer in Ethiopia may not easily be able to access this infrastructure and export his produce to Europe or China, this is because the hard infrastructure is there, but the soft infrastructure (regulation, banking, simplification of restrictions) needed for this farmer to export his produce has not been addressed. So, if these projects are designed to benefit HOA citizens (that rely on agriculture and livestock) then they should be designed in a way that ensures the HOA domestic economy is integrated into this global value chain. But currently, it is still marginalised.”

Homegrown infrastructure solutions could be encouraged to circumvent these complex issues associated with externally funded projects. Successful examples include the Berbera-corridor Road project connecting Somaliland’s port city of Berbera with Ethiopia’s border town of Togochale, otherwise known as the ‘Somaliland-Ethiopia cross border highway’ which has reached 85 percent completion.⁸⁹ This construction is “expected to make Somaliland, along with Djibouti and Kenya an emerging competitor in attracting Ethiopian importers and exporters”⁹⁰ thus creating a predicted 30% increased trade volume between Ethiopia and Somaliland.

⁸⁵ Yeboua, Kouassi, and Jakkie Cilliers. 2021. *Development prospects for the Horn of Africa countries to 2040*.

⁸⁶ Lesutis, Gediminas. 2021. “Infrastructure as techno-politics of differentiation: Socio-political effects of mega-infrastructures in Kenya.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 302-314. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/kenyas-mega-railway-project-leaves-society-more-unequal-than-before-170969>.

⁸⁷ Lesutis, Gediminas. 2021. *Kenya’s mega-railway project leaves society more unequal than before*. 21 November. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/kenyas-mega-railway-project-leaves-society-more-unequal-than-before-170969>. Pg. 1.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Somaliland Standard. 2022. *The cross-border Berbera Corridor-linking Somaliland and Ethiopia nears completion*. 29 June. Accessed June 2, 2022. <https://somalilandstandard.com/the-cross-border-berbera-corridor-linking-somaliland-and-ethiopia-nears-completion>.

⁹⁰ Somaliland Standard. 2022. *The cross-border Berbera Corridor-linking Somaliland and Ethiopia nears completion*. 29 June. Accessed June 2, 2022. <https://somalilandstandard.com/the-cross-border-berbera-corridor-linking-somaliland-and-ethiopia-nears-completion>. pg. 1.

Second, modernising markets to incorporate secondary manufactured goods that could be traded regionally and internationally whilst harmonizing trade policies and legal frameworks in a manner that is mutually beneficial for all parties involved, is an opportunity that must not be overlooked. The region's overreliance on exporting low-value raw materials “puts the economies at the mercy of fluctuating international markets and makes macroeconomic and budgetary planning difficult.”⁹¹ Fortunately, the Africa Continental Free Trade Area agreement provides a crucial opportunity to promote regional trade and manufacturing across nations in order to diversify economies away from commodity exports. According to the Institute for Security Studies, roughly 1% of the population in Eritrea and 19% in Ethiopia are internet users which isolates these countries from the technologically interconnected world.⁹² Lack of competition in technology and manufacturing markets across the region prevents economies from realising their potential and establishing vibrant digital economies while pushing leading innovation for the wider continent.⁹³ Addressing this issue will, as aspired by the ‘Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa’ “improve independent development capacity and catch up with the pace of the times.”⁹⁴

Thirdly, centring the HoA's competitive advantage—rural agriculture, in development policies is instrumental for achieving progress focusing strategically on advancing smallholder farm productivity through mega infrastructure projects like the Mombasa-Nairobi and Addis Ababa-Djibouti railways. There is a critical need to move agriculture forward in the Horn of Africa underlined by the region's fast-growing populations, mainly in rural areas, which remain vulnerable to food insecurity, unemployment, and environmental degradation.⁹⁵ The region's concentration of unskilled labour indicates untapped opportunities in agricultural development, hence innovative, and regionally coordinated agricultural-led policies must be explored amongst states to enhance food security and reduce absolute poverty. Such policies could incorporate agricultural research and technology-sharing in the form of physical training centres across major HoA cities and training ‘cluster’ sites in remote districts to enhance skills-development and improve linkages with the rural economy; cross-border capital investments in rural infrastructure such as irrigation, dams, and roads;

⁹¹ Yeboua, Kouassi, and Jakkie Cilliers. 2021. *Development prospects for the Horn of Africa countries to 2040*. Pg. 1.

⁹² Yeboua, Kouassi, and Jakkie Cilliers. 2021. *Development prospects for the Horn of Africa countries to 2040*.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China. 2022. *Wang Yi Talks about the "Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa"*. Pg. 1.

⁹⁵ Goedde, Lutz, Amandla Ooko-Ombaka, and Gillian Pais. 2019. *Winning in Africa's agricultural market*. 15 February. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/agriculture/our-insights/winning-in-africas-agricultural-market>.

as well as farmer support mechanisms such as credit and banking services. These policy instruments should seek to raise productivity and returns from self-employed workers in the local economy for improved developmental prosperity.

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