

# South Africa's support to peace and security in Burundi

Chido Mutangadura and Priyal Singh



South African support to Burundi's stability has been extensive. This report gives an overview of bilateral engagements between the two countries. It outlines opportunities for South African stakeholders to take a more robust, comprehensive and coordinated approach to Burundi, to support long-term peace, security and development. The report focuses on key thematic areas, existing bilateral agreements, the work of civil society and prevailing regional dynamics.

## Key findings

- ▶ South Africa's considerable historical investment in supporting peace and security in Burundi is widely regarded as one of the clearest examples of the country's commitment to a principled and value-based foreign policy.
- ▶ The role South Africa played is one that greatly bolstered perceptions of its leadership, credibility and moral authority on continental peace and security concerns.
- ▶ Following the instability that has plagued Burundi since its controversial 2015 elections, many international stakeholders have regarded South Africa as a largely peripheral actor – one that could have played a much more direct and active role in supporting stability.
- ▶ Over the past decade, South Africa has nonetheless shown its commitment to peace and security in Burundi through supporting the development of public institutions, and providing electoral support and civil service training.
- ▶ Citizen diplomacy has featured prominently, with various South African civil society and private actors supporting conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Burundi.
- ▶ Numerous official bilateral cooperation agreements have been established over the past decade in areas such as economic cooperation, education, health, and peace and security. The implementation of these, however, has been largely fragmented and has lacked adequate follow-up.
- ▶ Effectively navigating complex regional interests and agendas is a key challenge for South Africa, should it seek to play a more active role in contributing to long-term peace and security in Burundi.

## Recommendations

### South African foreign policy stakeholders should:

- ▶ Prioritise the development of a holistic, overarching strategy – South Africa and Burundi have extensive bilateral cooperation arrangements across government departments and stakeholders. Further engagements should be viewed more holistically, drawing seemingly disparate bilateral interactions into a common overarching strategy. This should take into account active citizen diplomacy, given the considerable efforts of South African civil society organisations and private actors in Burundi.
- ▶ Leverage political capital, credibility and technical expertise – South Africa is regarded as a credible, authoritative and respected actor among high-level Burundian officials and grassroots peace and security stakeholders. It should leverage this goodwill as a potential entry point to engage the Burundian government and seek assurances that the government will cooperate with concerned regional and international peace and security actors. Similarly, South Africa could draw on the significant pool of expertise among skilled South African personnel who directly contributed to Burundi's peace, security and stability throughout the late 1990s until the mid-2000s.
- ▶ Navigate regional political dynamics and current initiatives – South Africa should ensure any initiative or intervention in Burundi enjoys the buy-in and support of all key regional actors. South Africa could use its current term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and upcoming term as chair of the African Union, to drive greater international consensus on how best to address long-term peace and security concerns stemming from Burundi.

## Introduction

South Africa's role in contributing to peace and security in Burundi is rooted in the country's facilitation of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement and subsequent involvement in leading its implementation.<sup>1</sup>

The signing of the agreement on 28 August 2000 marked the beginning of a significant period of South African military, diplomatic and technical involvement, lasting for close to a decade, to strengthen the Burundian peace and security environment.

This engagement was built on the momentum then president Nelson Mandela created in the negotiation phase of the Arusha Agreement, and was initiated in October 2001 with the deployment of the South African Protection Support Detachment (SAPSD), composed of 754 South African National Defence Force (SANDF) personnel, to protect returning Burundian politicians under the provisions of the agreement.<sup>2</sup>

The SAPSD laid the groundwork for South Africa's significant military, technical and strategic involvement in various iterations of multilateral peace operations in Burundi, under the auspices of the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN). Specifically, a one-year AU Mission in Burundi (AMIB) was deployed in April 2003 and was subsequently 're-hatted' into the UN Operation in Burundi (ONUB). The SANDF contingent served in both of these international efforts.

The South African government is well-placed to reassess the qualitative role it can play

South Africa also actively supported the AU Special Task Force (AUSTF) as it began to draw to a close in 2006, as well as a reconfigured UN peace mission known as the UN Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB) from December that year. The mandate of the AUSTF officially came to an end in June 2009, leading to the withdrawal of several hundred SANDF troops.

Although South Africa's approaches to the situation in Burundi were arguably less focused and less visible following this withdrawal, it continued to engage various actors in the Burundian government. However, questions

arise as to how South Africa can better harmonise and coordinate these engagements to play a more effective and constructive role in supporting peace and security in Burundi, with a view to strengthen the country's long-term stability and development.

South Africa's considerable prior investment in Burundi is symbolic of its commitment to a principled and value-based foreign policy; specifically, one that prioritises peace, security and development in Africa. The deterioration of Burundi's political and security environment following a controversial presidential election in 2015 has therefore called into question South Africa's continued and future role in and commitment to supporting stability in Burundi.

Over the past four years, this instability in Burundi has seen various failed global efforts, led by a host of subregional, continental and international actors, to engage with the Burundian government and address the root causes of the conflict.

Well over 400 000 Burundians have been displaced as a result of this conflict. This has occurred amid reports of widespread human rights abuses, targeted assassinations, state-led suppression of media and civil society, and ongoing clashes between security forces and opposition groups.<sup>3</sup>

Following recent political changes in South Africa, the South African government is well-placed to reassess the qualitative role it can play in and the kind of assistance it can provide to Burundi by reflecting on its key foreign policy priorities, as contained in its African Agenda.

This report therefore looks at relatively recent engagements between the two countries that could serve as an effective basis to deepen relations. In this way South Africa could reclaim its historical role in supporting peace, security and development in Burundi.

These engagements are specifically considered in terms of institution building, existing bilateral agreements, broader (semi-official) diplomatic efforts, and identified trends in South Africa's foreign policy positions on peace and security developments in Burundi, as well as in terms of regional political dynamics.

The report concludes with a critical reflection on these engagements and recommendations on establishing a more robust overarching South African foreign policy strategy on Burundi.

## Methodology

The scope and terms of reference of this research report were informed and guided by interactions with the Mediation Support Unit (MSU) of the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO).

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) research team carried out extensive desk research of secondary sources, including official reports by government actors and intergovernmental organisations, official government budgets, speeches from key South African stakeholders, local and international news sources and academic resources. This was in conjunction with extensive primary information gathering and analysis, compiled through 21 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders from Burundi, South Africa and subregional intergovernmental organisations.

The ISS research team conducted qualitative analysis of parliamentary proceedings and press releases by the South African government, the AU and the UN. Desk research also included analysing annual reports and strategic plans from government entities such as DIRCO, the African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund (ARF), the National School of Government (NSG), formerly known as the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy, and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

The interviews with key stakeholders were used to triangulate and validate information gathered through the desk research. These were conducted from May to August 2018. Interviewees in South Africa and Burundi were identified across the government, academic and civil society spheres. The ISS research team primarily based the content and scope of these interviews on its interactions with the MSU (including two roundtable discussions), which provided an opportunity to reflect on developments and discuss the nature of the study.

The main limitations of the study were encountered in validating information, specifically concerning recent (post-2015) developments in Burundi, in light of significant government-imposed restrictions on information and research that is critical of the country's political and security situation. A secondary challenge encountered throughout the research process concerned

the fragmented and oftentimes inconclusive nature of primary and secondary accounts of South Africa–Burundi foreign policy interactions, which spanned a wide range of often-disparate stakeholders and organisations in South Africa.

## South African support for institution building in Burundi

South Africa has made various efforts in recent years to support the development of robust and inclusive political institutions in Burundi. These can largely be understood within the country's commitment to post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD) as aligned with continental peace and security policy frameworks.<sup>4</sup>

This section discusses key areas of South Africa's support for institution building in Burundi. Broadly, such efforts consist of providing electoral support and capacity building to strengthen Burundi's civil service.

### Electoral support

Elections in Africa are often contentious and can become a source of instability. The events in Burundi since 2015 are a case in point, and emblematic of this general trend. Providing electoral support has therefore proved to be one of South Africa's most tangible strategies to prevent violence, and promote good governance and democratisation, within its broader PCRD commitments.

South Africa's approach to electoral support in Africa has evolved significantly over the past two decades

South Africa's Independent Election Commission (IEC), for instance, has played a leading role in attempting to address technical capacity shortfalls experienced by many electoral management bodies across the continent. This type of assistance focuses on strengthening the capacity and efficiency of such bodies, to bolster public confidence in their ability to organise credible elections.<sup>5</sup>

The South African government's approach to providing electoral support on the continent has evolved significantly over the past two decades. Before 2011 South Africa pursued a largely bilateral electoral support strategy. Its efforts were generally well regarded and the

country was seen as being committed to strengthening institutions across the continent, from Rwanda (2003) to Lesotho (2007), Namibia (2009) and South Sudan (2011).

This approach to bilateral support included the targeted training of election management body officials, including direct technical and logistical support.

An examination of annual ARF reports indicates that South Africa has adopted an increasingly multilateral approach to electoral support since 2012. Specifically, the government has focused its attention on contributing to electoral support missions led by the AU and Southern African Development Community (SADC).

South Africa's relatively recent electoral support to Burundi, however, bucks this trend and remains primarily informed by bilateral efforts. This can be assumed to be based on the deep historical links between the two countries in the area of peace and security. To this effect, South Africa has provided electoral support to Burundi since the country's first post-conflict elections in 2005, largely in collaboration with the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

The establishment of the National Independent Electoral Commission of Burundi (CENI)<sup>6</sup> in 2009 deepened engagement between South Africa and Burundi. This has been particularly important in terms of direct requests for support from CENI to the IEC, which also works within regional electoral commission bodies and forums such as the East African Community's (EAC) Forum of Electoral Commissions and the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries (ECF-SADC).

These forums consist of representatives of the electoral management bodies of member states and were established to support electoral management, monitoring and observation.

The ARF, which directly supports the IEC's electoral support missions on the continent, does not normally provide funds to the IEC if it is working under ECF-SADC-led efforts. As part of the two countries' initial engagements to this effect, CENI commissioners were invited in 2009 to observe South Africa's general elections as part of a broader capacity-building initiative.

The South African Embassy in Burundi followed up on this observer mission by inviting a CENI delegation to observe municipal elections in South Africa in May 2011.<sup>7</sup>

The delegation was led by the newly appointed CENI deputy chair. The objective of this visit was to contribute to CENI's capacity-building preparations for Burundi's 2015 elections.

South Africa took a multi-stakeholder approach in engaging with and preparing the CENI delegation during the 2011 observer mission. The IEC, in conjunction with DIRCO's Diplomatic Academy and the ARF, collaborated with civil society organisations (CSOs) such as International IDEA and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA). Three workshops were held with the visiting delegation in May that year.

### South Africa has provided electoral support to Burundi since the country's first post-conflict elections in 2005

The IEC hosted the first workshop, which was designed to inform participants about South African election laws and procedures and internationally recognised best practices in election observation. EISA and International IDEA hosted the second workshop, which discussed various technical and administrative issues related to election cycles, including methods and procedures for the effective functioning of electoral commissions, logistics and resource management. IDASA hosted the last workshop, which covered the South African local government system, post-election power transfer and international best practices.

South Africa's most recent election support initiative in Burundi – in December 2014 – involved the deployment of an IEC assessment mission. The IEC partnered with the UNDP and CENI to assess Burundi's preparedness for the 2015 polls and identify key areas in which to offer technical assistance.

The mission identified and mapped potential voting centres, provided voting station materials, and considered logistical support requirements and the need to establish a results centre. However, the IEC did not play a substantive role in Burundi following this because it did not get more funding from the ARF.

As a result of its comparative lack of engagement after 2014 the South African government is seen as a

relatively neutral or peripheral regional actor, as it was not directly involved in the complex political dynamics that characterised Burundi's 2015 electoral process and the country's consequent peace and security environment.

### Civil service training

The Regional Capacity Building (RCB) project, which ran from 2008 to 2013 and was carried out by the NSG, can be viewed as a second key area in South Africa's institution-building efforts in Burundi. The project fell under the NSG's International and Special Projects division, whose function was to establish bilateral and multilateral programmes with identified countries.

The RCB project specifically targeted the National School of Administration of Burundi (ENA Burundi), the Rwanda Institute of Administration and Management, and the Capacity Building Unit of the Ministry of Human Resource Development in then southern Sudan.

The RCB project's main objective was to use the NSG's capacity development model and tools to strengthen the capabilities of management development institutes (MDIs) in these three post-conflict societies. The overarching objective was to improve the management and leadership capability of the civil service in these countries. The RCB provided a number of programmes that focused on monitoring and evaluation, training of trainers, supply chain management and gender mainstreaming.

Respondents indicated that South Africa's expertise in several sectors was an important source of soft power, which could be better leveraged

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funded the project to the value of CAN\$10 million (US\$7.6 million),<sup>8</sup> in partnership with the South African-based African Management Development Institutes Network (AMDIN). The NSG signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with ENA Burundi and CIDA South Africa in July 2008.<sup>9</sup>

The project was implemented through capacity-building seminars and workshops hosted in the various partner countries. The first planning workshop took place in July 2008 in Pretoria in collaboration with AMDIN. This was followed by a capacity-building workshop in December 2008 in Kigali, Rwanda.

The NSG also deployed trainers to the respective countries to conduct the training-of-trainer sessions, which focused on interventions for strategic planning, improved procurement management, improved financial practices and gender advocacy.

Speaking anonymously, an NSG official noted that Burundi was one of the first countries to effectively implement the lessons learned from the RCB project. The official noted that effective leadership in ENA Burundi played a key role in the project's success, despite the country's relatively lower access to resources.

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> 400 000

BURUNDIANS DISPLACED BY  
CONFLICT IN THE PAST 4 YEARS

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The final RCB project steering meeting was held in November 2013 to reflect on the project's performance and discuss possible future engagements. The project officially concluded on 30 November after the expiry of its five-year term. The NSG's 2013/14 annual report indicates the project achieved its four expected outcomes, in terms of:

- Improved MDI organisational performance
- Improved MDI regional and in-country collaboration
- Increased provision of MDI quality-assured training
- Increased use of integrated management practices in the workplace (civil service)

Despite these successes, NSG reports indicate it faced significant challenges in implementing the project. Firstly, challenges stemming from the NSG's limited capacity to absorb the budgeted funds negatively affected the project's efficiency. Moreover, personnel changes in the partner MDIs and among programme managers caused implementation delays.

Negotiations with ENA Burundi over the MOU also led to delays, which were exacerbated by a change in the project's logical framework model midway through the implementation period. This affected the outcomes originally expected.

The final report on the RCB project indicates that discussions took place over possibly establishing a community of practice to sustain the regional partnerships developed as a result of the project's prior work. An examination of the NSG's reports and strategic plans<sup>10</sup> since then, however, indicates that there are currently no plans to follow up on the post-RCB regional partnerships.

The implementation of the project presents several lessons and entry points for South Africa to explore more substantive engagements with Burundi. Interview respondents indicated that South Africa's expertise in several sectors was an important source of soft power, which could be better leveraged.

Respondents also noted that implementing capacity-building projects in African states, such as the RCB project, was in line with the country's foreign policy priorities in terms of its African Agenda, which seeks to promote regional peace, security and development.<sup>11</sup>

## Bilateral agreements

South Africa and Burundi have signed several bilateral agreements covering various areas of cooperation and collaboration, including the defence, economic and education sectors.

The DIRCO white paper titled 'Building a world: the diplomacy of Ubuntu'<sup>12</sup> highlights the role of strong bilateral relations in implementing South Africa's foreign policy, particularly when promoting trade and investment, development partnerships, infrastructure development and technical assistance.<sup>13</sup>

Existing bilateral agreements offer key entry points for South Africa to deepen its engagements with Burundi, as it can build on existing diplomatic efforts based on common interests and mutual benefits.

A faculty member of the Business Institute at the University of Burundi remarked that deep-rooted socio-economic dynamics have fuelled Burundi's current peace and security challenges. This indicates that greater cooperation on economic and trade-related issues between the two countries could have an impact on the broader structural drivers and root causes of conflict in Burundi.

These efforts, however, require enhanced coordination among South African government actors to ensure a more meaningful overall impact.

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the bilateral agreements has been uneven and fragmented. Interview respondents from Burundi also noted that they have had limited impact because of a lack of meaningful follow-up.

Existing bilateral agreements offer key entry points for South Africa to deepen its engagements with Burundi

The most notable bilateral agreements are those signed during former South African president Jacob Zuma's state visit to Burundi in August 2011, which built on a prior general cooperation agreement signed in 2007. These deal with cooperation in the areas of defence, education, agriculture and livestock, sports and recreation, and include an MOU on economic cooperation.

The MOU on economic cooperation most tangibly resulted in the DTI awarding R10 million (US\$703,000) to South African power generation and distribution company Megatron Federal (part of Ellies Holdings Ltd) in 2012. The DTI disbursed the funding for Megatron Federal to conduct feasibility studies for two separate hydropower energy projects in Burundi, valued at US\$150 million in total.<sup>14</sup>

As the deputy minister of trade and industry at the time, Elizabeth Thabethe, noted, '[It is] really encouraging ... that a private company has taken advantage of the opportunity that government has created by levelling the economic playing field through the engagement between the two countries' governments.'<sup>15</sup>

Little information is publicly available on the status of this project and the outcomes of the feasibility studies. However, allegations of impropriety concerning the nature of these contracts and how they were awarded have since emerged.

### Deeper economic diplomacy and cooperation haven't featured very clearly since 2014

Another highlight in the strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries occurred in late 2014 during President Pierre Nkurunziza's first official state visit to South Africa. Among other matters, the implementation of existing bilateral cooperation agreements was discussed and an agreement on establishing a joint commission of cooperation was signed.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the urgency with which it was first presented, the current status of the joint commission is unclear. This may be owing to political uncertainty in Burundi. Nevertheless, the potential for a joint commission is another key entry point to deepen South African engagements in support of peace, security and development in Burundi.

Additionally, as part of Nkurunziza's visit, a South Africa–Burundi Business Forum gathering was held in Cape Town, at which the possibility of establishing a bilateral business council was explored. Speaking on this event, then minister of trade and industry Dr Rob Davies noted that South Africa would undertake a business mission to Burundi the following year.<sup>17</sup>

The outcome of this mission, however, is unclear in light of the political turmoil that occurred in Burundi in 2015.

The acting director of trade and investment in South Africa at that time, Yunus Hoosen, said that the business forum provided a number of investment opportunities in Burundi in the housing, infrastructure development and energy sectors.<sup>18</sup> This was echoed by a Cape Town-based Burundian scholar, who identified these as strategic areas for private sector investment.

The outcomes of the business forum and current status of the bilateral business council are unclear. Nevertheless, these developments are a further entry point in terms of existing bilateral economic cooperation agreements to build on and deepen South African engagement in the country.

One outcome of the state visit and the work of the business forum was the DTI's invitation to South African companies to apply to take part in an 'outward selling and investment' mission to Rwanda and Burundi in June 2015.<sup>19</sup> Investment sectors included agriculture, mining, energy and infrastructure development, as outlined during the business forum.

Investment in these sectors was seen as critical in addressing Burundi's socio-economic challenges, while reflecting South Africa's principled commitment to economic diplomacy as set out in its African Agenda. According to Hoosen, the MOU on economic cooperation and the business forum was key in assisting Burundi's post-conflict economy to transition away from donor dependency and toward greater investment generation.

Despite the optimism surrounding the 2014 state visit, South Africa's economic diplomacy efforts have largely failed to yield positive outcomes for either country. This should be seen in light of the considerable political and peace and security-related developments that have unfolded in Burundi since 2015.

Deeper economic diplomacy and cooperation have not featured to any observable degree since 2014. South African Airways' cancellation of direct flights to Burundi in 2015, owing to the growing costs of maintaining routes alongside dropping profits, is emblematic of this more recent state of affairs, despite high-level talks on the importance of these routes during the state visit.<sup>20</sup>

However, there are nascent potential entry points to deepen economic cooperation. This is reflected, for instance, in South African state-owned logistics company Transnet's broader regional efforts and Africa strategy. In terms of these it wants to establish a stronger economic foothold in the landlocked markets of Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda, among others, by supporting the development of large infrastructural and logistics projects.<sup>21</sup>

Such efforts should be understood in the context of the significant infrastructural deficits that hamper Burundi's economy. However, the country's ongoing instability and insecurity need to be addressed first to allow for this kind of large-scale and long-term investment, as noted by an interviewee at the University of Burundi.

Identifying possible entry points and including them in an overarching strategy aimed at more effectively engaging Burundi, at a bilateral level, should therefore be treated as a priority. These efforts should build on the work of domestic actors such as state-owned enterprises, the private sector, the DTI, DIRCO and the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

The bilateral agreements between South Africa and Burundi also cover social and cultural relations, specifically in education, health, sports and culture. Again, however, implementation of these bilateral agreements has been uneven, with cooperation in the education sectors of both countries showing the greatest comparative level of progress.

An indication of relatively recent developments in implementing these agreements can be seen, for example, in the work of the South African Department of Sport and Recreation, which in 2011 gave the government of Burundi sports kits and equipment.<sup>22</sup> While this was a limited engagement, sports diplomacy is a potential area for deepening engagement between the two countries, as it is increasingly seen as a critical and innovative component of peacebuilding and PCRD.<sup>23</sup>

A youth sports centre,<sup>24</sup> which was established in Gatumba (the border region between Burundi and the DRC) in 2011 by the now defunct UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace,<sup>25</sup> could be a further entry point for South Africa to play a constructive sports diplomacy role in the country.

An additional area of bilateral cooperation between the two countries is the activities of the South African Department of Water Affairs,<sup>26</sup> which in 2014 participated in negotiations to establish a partnership with Burundi's Ministry of Water, Environment, Territorial Planning and Urban Development. However, there is no evidence that the partnership was established.

## Citizen engagements can deepen bilateral ties in a way that maximises South Africa's impact in Burundi

In 2014 the heads of state of both countries also acknowledged that there were moves towards signing an agreement on health cooperation. However, it is unclear whether an MOU on referring Burundian patients for medical treatment in South Africa was ever implemented.

The bilateral agreement on education cooperation has facilitated capacity-building efforts aimed at strengthening the Higher Education Management Information System, which manages data in higher education institutions in Burundi. It has also resulted in capacity-building engagements focused on teacher education and higher education planning.

Several Burundian respondents were interested in deepening the current unofficial academic engagement between the two countries. This aspect of South Africa–Burundi relations is examined in greater depth in the following section.

### Citizen diplomacy engagements

Citizen diplomacy has been a significant and consistent feature of bilateral relations, with various engagements involving academics, CSOs and government officials. The research findings indicate that semi-official and unofficial engagements are viable opportunities to deepen bilateral ties in a way that maximises South Africa's impact in Burundi.

These kinds of engagements augment South Africa's official relations by leveraging the agency and expertise found in the country's robust and vibrant civil society. The impact of these engagements has been particularly acute in key areas such as conflict resolution and transitional justice, in which South African actors have a degree of

authority and credibility as they speak and offer lessons from their own historical experiences.

The Arusha peace process laid the foundation for South African civil society stakeholders to engage with actors in Burundi. The most prominent of these included the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), IDASA, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), the Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) and the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA). Furthermore, government institutions such as the IEC have partnered with CSOs in their engagements with Burundian counterparts such as CENI.

Semi-official and unofficial bilateral engagements have been carried out through joint research projects, study visits, and capacity-building and training initiatives. These efforts have included high-level interactions with Burundian government officials, as well as more localised grassroots-level engagements. However, they have diminished in recent years for a number of reasons, in no small part because of Burundi's relapse into instability since 2015. This has been reinforced by the Burundian government's implementation of restrictive measures on civil society that have closed the political space.<sup>27</sup>

### South Africa's bilateral contact with Burundi should incorporate a mix of official and unofficial engagements

This is particularly problematic, given that such engagements have largely assisted South Africa's official diplomatic mission to Burundi in carrying out its mandate, with particular regard to promoting peace, security and development.

The current political dynamics in Burundi suggest that South Africa's bilateral engagements with the Burundian government could be strengthened through a more holistic strategy that incorporates a mix of official and unofficial engagements.

An interviewee from the IJR argued that, in light of the political sensitivities and complexity surrounding Burundi's current peace and security environment, grassroots engagement is a critical entry point that could be used to build trust and lay the foundation for longer-term – official – diplomatic efforts.

South Africa's semi-official and unofficial bilateral engagements can be understood within three overarching areas of work, namely supporting the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) in Burundi; contributing to conflict resolution, peacebuilding and PCRD; and expanding academic engagement.

### Establishing Burundi's truth and reconciliation commission

South Africa has played a significant role in supporting the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission in Burundi (commission vérité et réconciliation-CVR), including through study visits, training and research projects.

The provisions for establishing the CVR are laid out in the Arusha Agreement. Nkurunziza pledged to establish a transitional justice mechanism in 2012 and the CVR was officially inaugurated in 2016. Public hearings are due to start in 2019.

Burundi has experienced several episodes of large-scale, inter-ethnic violence: in 1965, 1972, 1988, 1991 and 1993. This history of cyclical violence presents several challenges in securing transitional justice through implementing a credible, impartial and effective mechanism.

The first challenge was in determining whether the CVR process would include a judicial element. The long history of conflict in Burundi meant that by 2005, many perpetrators and victims of earlier atrocities – such as in 1965 and 1972 – had died.

An attempt in 2005 to establish a dual transitional justice mechanism failed owing to controversy over its timing, mandate and composition.<sup>28</sup> The operational phase of the TRC was officially launched in 2016 and it has already undertaken several initiatives in preparation for the 2019 public hearings. In November 2018, the Burundian Parliament elected 13 new commissioners.

Despite making some progress, the CVR has faced several challenges in pursuing its mandate. It must operate in a context of complex social and political dynamics, which have been exacerbated by the 2015 political crisis. Its ongoing operationalisation has also been marred by a lack of human and financial resources.

The traditional marginalisation of women from political processes in the country could affect the CVR in terms of representation.<sup>29</sup> The land question also looms over the process, as communities struggle to address historical challenges relating to the claims of returning refugees and other internally displaced persons. A Cape Town-based Burundian scholar notes that the establishment of the CVR has been obstructed by slow administrative processes and insufficient legal protection for witnesses.

Burundi has explored several TRC models by engaging former TRC commissioners from South Africa, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Togo and Kenya. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has been a particularly active international stakeholder in promoting these engagements, which have included organising meetings, as well as a conference in the Burundian capital Bujumbura that brought together former commissioners from across the continent.<sup>30</sup>

## The marginalisation of women from political processes in Burundi could affect the truth and reconciliation commission in terms of representation

One interviewee, a former Burundian CVR commissioner, noted that South Africa's TRC model was the one most appropriate for Burundi given its focus on reconciliation and forgiveness; and because Burundi's cyclical history of violence means that securing retributive justice and reparations is all but impossible.

The Burundi Policy Reform Project, a USAID-sponsored initiative that ran from 2007 to 2011, sent 19 participants on study visits to Johannesburg and Cape Town. The Burundian delegates met a wide range of stakeholders from CSOs and statutory bodies, including:

- Khulumani Support Group
- Steve Biko Centre for Bioethics
- South African Human Rights Commission
- Human Rights Institute of South Africa
- Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
- Foundation for Human Rights
- Trauma Centre for Survivors of Violence and Torture
- Constitutional Court

The delegates also met former constitutional court judge Albie Sachs and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu to get a practical perspective on South Africa's TRC.

As the momentum for the CVR in Burundi increased, the government appointed a seven-person technical committee to visit South Africa in 2011.



BURUNDI HAS EXPLORED  
SEVERAL TRC MODELS

The committee met officials from the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development and the Nelson Mandela Foundation. It also engaged with other experts in the field of transitional justice and reconciliation, including the IJR.

In 2014 the IJR and AFSC organised a study visit for Burundi's CVR commissioners.<sup>31</sup> The delegates met former commissioners of the South African TRC. A Burundian journalist who was part of the delegation praised the study visit for providing participants with networking opportunities and exposing them to best practices. One of the delegates noted that the study visit reinforced the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation, best practices and the centrality of victims.

The IJR also facilitated media training for 15 Burundi journalists on covering TRC processes in an ethical and professional manner, noting the particular technicalities and sensitivities that surround these processes. The officials who conducted the training included representatives from the President's Office and Ministry of Information.

### Academic engagement

Academic engagement is a key potential entry point to deepen engagements between the two countries. As mentioned above, South Africa and Burundi in 2011 signed an agreement on education cooperation, but engagement has mainly been conducted through unofficial and semi-official bilateral interactions. It is an area many Burundian respondents showed an interest in developing.

Interviewees noted that South Africa has well-established and respected institutions of higher education and research as a result of its comparative development, which stands in stark contrast to education and research conditions in Burundi.

An interviewee from the Human Sciences Research Council noted that South African researchers primarily conducted joint research projects with departments and faculty members from the University of Bujumbura.

An example of this kind of research collaboration is the work of AISA, which conducted a research project in 2012–13 on the legacy of the SANDF's deployment during the Arusha peace process. The project was titled *Managing Ethnic and Political Conflicts in Africa:*

*Assessing the African Union–South Africa's Mission in Burundi.* The research found that the SANDF achieved three of its four main objectives but failed to create a secure environment outside Bujumbura.<sup>32</sup>

Senior researchers from AISA led the project in collaboration with members of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Bujumbura. AISA also partnered with the South African Embassy in Burundi and Burundian government officials during the research. Their findings were presented to South African military intelligence officials.

Researchers noted that during the course of the project they identified certain key challenges that South African stakeholders faced in gaining access to relevant information and stakeholders in Burundi.

Academic engagement is a key potential entry point to deepen connections between the two countries

In addition to joint research projects, the IJR has also provided platforms for Burundian academics to present their research. In 2013 the IJR, in collaboration with the Life & Peace Institute (LPI), published a report titled 'Great Lakes Region peace from the ground up' as part of LPI's *New Routes* online peace research journal.<sup>33</sup>

Academic engagements are currently being conducted to support the TRC process. The IJR has been prominent in this regard, partnering with the Institute for Scientific Research and Development at the University of Burundi on a research project to document mass graves and identify victims of the country's historical conflicts.

The research, which is based on survey data, has a gender-sensitive approach, with a 58–42 proportion of men and women surveyed. Researchers carried out surveys in Muyinga, Gitega and Rumonge provinces.

The research was conducted in preparation for the TRC's public hearings, hence the expectation that TRC commissioners would play a significant role. The TRC established a research division following consultations with the IJR. However, a Cape Town-based Burundian scholar noted that the TRC's research capacity is severely limited.

The IJR therefore partnered with the University of Bujumbura, which is providing human resources for data collection. The final research report, titled 'Wounded memories: perceptions of past violence in Burundi and perspectives for reconciliation', is available for download on the IJR website.

### **Contributing to conflict resolution and peacebuilding**

South African institutions have played a prominent role in developing conflict management, peacebuilding and PCRDR capacity in Burundi. Both the government and civil society have been involved in this, from the time of the Arusha peace process up to the present. Generally, CSOs have played a more prominent role in these processes.

A senior researcher from AISA noted that by the end of the SANDF deployment, nascent CSOs in Burundi were closely monitored by the government.

Since then, Burundi's civil society has asserted and established itself in the country, while maintaining robust links with broader international CSO networks.<sup>34</sup> This has provided South African CSOs with numerous entry points for engagement in Burundi.

South Africa has faced allegations of not articulating its position on Burundi clearly or quickly

However, since late 2018 the government has used new laws governing the recruitment practices of international CSOs operating in the country, instituting ethnic employment quotas, to suspend and expel certain organisations.<sup>35</sup> This has been regarded as an indication of the government's broader efforts to restrict and impede civil society.

A key example of the role South African CSOs have played is the work done by ACCORD in providing track two assistance (or 'backchannel' diplomacy) during the Arusha negotiation process. It developed skills and capacity in conflict resolution, management and peacebuilding among key government and grassroots actors across the country; and provided legal aid services to returning former refugees and internally displaced persons.<sup>36</sup>

In 2003 ACCORD opened an office in Bujumbura to coordinate its work in-country, with four smaller satellite offices opening in later years that specifically focused on providing legal aid and technical assistance.

More recently, ACCORD has scaled back its activities in support of conflict resolution, peacebuilding and legal assistance because of Burundi's political instability, as well as more general challenges relating to project-specific funding and shifting donor priorities.

It should be noted, however, that despite these challenges, ACCORD has undertaken interventions in Burundi. For example, it provided training on conflict resolution and transitional justice to the AU's Human Rights Observers Mission in the country in September 2016.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, it undertook consultations in August 2018 in the DRC and Burundi on strengthening capacities for mediation and peacebuilding.

While little public information is available, it can safely be assumed that certain key South African individuals with a long-standing professional history linked to Burundi, such as former special representative to the Great Lakes Region Ambassador Welile Nhlapo, have worked through official and semi-official diplomatic channels to support peace, security and stability in the country.

ACCORD, along with other research-intensive South African CSOs and think tanks such as the ISS, the South African Institute for International Affairs and the Institute for Global Dialogue, has also conducted research on peace and security developments in Burundi. This has involved varying degrees of collaboration with Burundian stakeholders and international peace and security actors.

One such study conducted by the ISS in 2013, for example, highlighted South Africa's missed opportunity to play a leading role in PCRDR and peacebuilding in Burundi after the withdrawal of its troops in 2009.<sup>38</sup>

### **Overview of official South African positions on Burundi**

South Africa has repeatedly faced allegations that it has not articulated its foreign policy positions on developments in Burundi clearly or in a timely manner. This is evidenced by the South African government's muted reaction to Burundi's 2010 elections, in which South Africa provided electoral support to the country but

did not take a clear position on the outcome of the polls, which were marred by opposition boycotts.

More recently, DIRCO has expressed concern over Burundi's peace and security environment following the disputed 2015 elections without articulating the kind of role it envisions for itself beyond supporting local Burundian peace and security stakeholders and the stalled EAC-led Inter-Burundi Dialogue process.

South Africa's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Jerry Matjila's recent statement<sup>39</sup> to the UNSC indicates that Pretoria will continue to support EAC-led initiatives. This may be problematic considering that there has been no progress since former Tanzanian president, Benjamin Mkapa submitted a facilitator's report to the regional body in February 2019.

This rather tepid foreign policy position seems to have been informed by the response to South Africa's initial endorsement of the AU's attempts in 2015 to deploy the proposed African Prevention and Protection Mission in Burundi (MAPROBU), which the Burundian government rejected, and which consequently failed to materialise.

The Burundian government has blocked attempts by international actors to intervene and address allegations of widespread human rights abuses

This position is even more muted in light of the various opportunities that have arisen since 2015 to give greater clarity on where South Africa stands on the increasingly intransigent positions of the Burundian government.

Zuma's role in leading an AU diplomatic mission to Burundi following the non-deployment of MAPROBU in 2015 is also informative. Whereas the former president had played a critical mediation role in supporting Burundi's peace process throughout the early 2000s, his 2015 intervention was viewed as largely ineffectual and biased towards the status quo.<sup>40</sup>

Over the past three years, the Burundian government has blocked all attempts by concerned international actors – including the UN, the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and various subregional and continental efforts – to intervene and address allegations of widespread human rights abuses, growing state-sponsored repression of opposition groups, and clashes between security forces and protestors.

Given South Africa's significant prior investment in Burundi's long-term peace, security and development, this perceived lack of a clear and comprehensive position on developments in the country stands in stark contrast to the kind of principled and value-based foreign policy that the country claims to pursue.



SA WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE  
SUPPORTING EAST AFRICAN  
COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES

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Keeping this overarching issue in mind, it is important to consider some of the more direct and immediate responses South Africa has provided on political developments in Burundi.

As a starting point, in May 2014 the main opposition parties in Burundi formed the Alliance for Democratic Change (ADC-Ikibiri) coalition in response to allegations of electoral fraud in local elections. The opposition parties that formed this alliance had boycotted the 2010 polls, leading to the National Council for the Defence of Democracy–Forces for the Defence of Democracy’s (CNDD-FDD) victory with 65% of the vote.<sup>41</sup>

Against this backdrop, South Africa expressed its satisfaction with its role in Burundi’s pre-election preparations.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to the views of a Cape Town-based scholar from Burundi, who argued that South Africa could have done more by using its leverage to broker a sustainable and inclusive political agreement between Burundi’s government and the opposition during this period.

The CNDD-FDD subsequently used its parliamentary majority to implement legislation that further closed the political space to dissent. Opposition leaders such as Agathon Rwasa went into exile as allegations of human rights abuses emerged.<sup>43</sup>

South Africa’s silence in the face of these developments was surprising given the government’s role in brokering the Magaliesburg Declaration in 2008,<sup>44</sup> which facilitated negotiations between Rwasa’s rebel PALIPEHUTU-FNL group and the government. Furthermore, more than 100 SANDF troops remained in Burundi until the end of 2009 to protect Rwasa.<sup>45</sup>

### Because of its activities on the UN Security Council, South Africa was involved in and apprised of international efforts in Burundi

As a result of its activities on the UN Security Council<sup>46</sup> South Africa had been actively involved in and apprised of international efforts concerning Burundi’s peace and security environment throughout this period. Its silence thus contributed to growing perceptions that South Africa was sliding into a more passive ‘firefighting role’ on continental matters previously regarded as the country’s core foreign policy priorities.

This sentiment was supported by an academic at the University of the Witwatersrand, who noted that South Africa tends to adopt clearer foreign policy positions only after highly visible conflicts have emerged.

Soon after Burundi’s 2015 elections, DIRCO condemned unconstitutional changes of government and reaffirmed South Africa’s support for regional initiatives to restore political normalcy in the country. This statement came days after Maj. Gen. Godefroid Niyombare’s attempted coup against



UNDERSTANDING REGIONAL  
DYNAMICS IS KEY TO SA’S  
BURUNDI ENGAGEMENTS

Nkurunziza,<sup>47</sup> indicating that South Africa's statement on the political crisis was largely levelled against those seeking to challenge the Nkurunziza government. A few months later, on 17 December 2015, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), meeting at an Ambassadorial level, announced its decision to deploy MAPROBU.<sup>48</sup>

The PSC intended to deploy the 5 000-strong peacekeeping force without Burundi's consent, following a violent escalation in the crisis that month. MAPROBU's mandate was to prevent the crisis from worsening further, promote conducive conditions for the Inter-Burundi Dialogue, facilitate disarmament and protect civilians.

Burundi objected to the deployment and threatened to respond militarily to any attempts to deploy MAPROBU, which it regarded as an invasion force in all but name. An AU summit in January 2016 subsequently reversed the PSC's recommendation to deploy MAPROBU,<sup>49</sup> citing the need to support the EAC mediation initiative (the Inter-Burundi Dialogue).

## Despite many challenges, regional state actors are leading efforts to address instability in Burundi

In February 2016 then minister of international relations and cooperation Maite Nkoana-Mashabane explained to Parliament that South Africa had backed the AU's decision not to deploy MAPROBU because it would be premature to send such a force to Burundi. The statement indicated South Africa's support for an inclusive dialogue and the work of the EAC-led mediation effort.

In the same month, South Africa led a five-state, high-level AU delegation to Burundi, which included the heads of state of Mauritania, Senegal, Gabon and Ethiopia. The delegation was meant to engage the government of Burundi and relevant stakeholders to promote inclusive political dialogue and address the country's prevailing instability and insecurity, focusing on displaced persons and refugees.

### Regional dynamics

Understanding regional dynamics, specifically the political interests and agendas of regional stakeholders, is critically important in deepening South African engagement with

Burundi. Despite considerable challenges and delays in achieving observable progress, regional state actors are leading efforts to address instability in Burundi through the EAC.

Deeper and more substantial engagements between South Africa and Burundi may therefore necessitate a thorough appraisal of how these engagements could affect prevailing regional political dynamics, insofar as they might prolong the intransigent and uncooperative position the Burundian government has taken on addressing human security concerns.

The main actors in Burundi are the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the EAC, as well as neighbouring and regional states such as Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya, which have considerable interests in Burundi's stability.

As noted above, the 26<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held in January 2016, decided to send a high-level AU delegation to Burundi. The delegation was dispatched for consultations with the government and other stakeholders in Burundi on the inclusive dialogue and the potential deployment of MAPROBU.<sup>50</sup>

This effort was largely seen to support EAC efforts to establish the Inter-Burundi Dialogue process. Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni initially took the lead role as chief mediator, having travelled to Burundi in July 2015 to meet Nkurunziza. Although notable, Museveni has shown little interest in progressing the mediation.

Tanzania has also played a leading role in resolving the political crisis as the host of the secretariat of the EAC. The country hosts the largest number of refugees from Burundi. Tanzania's former president Benjamin Mkapa also serves as the facilitator of the Inter-Burundi Dialogue.

The dialogue process, however, has largely failed to deliver any meaningful outcomes. It has been plagued by a lack of strategic coherence and consensus among EAC member states, as well as the organisation's associated failure to implement key decisions put forward by the facilitator. Burundi's government did not send representatives to the fifth and final round of the Inter-Burundi Dialogue.

The inter-Burundi Dialogue ended in February 2019. Mkapa has dismissed reports of his resignation, clarifying

that his tenure as the EAC facilitator expired following the submission of his report to the EAC. Mkapa and the UN's Special Envoy to Burundi Michel Kafando both agree that dialogue is key in resolving the political crisis.<sup>51</sup>

With the next presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for 2020, there is a dire need for an external actor to fill the vacuum created by the expiry of the EAC facilitator's tenure.

In May 2018 the ICGLR held an Extra-Ordinary Summit of ICGLR Heads of State in Luanda, Angola. Zuma attended the summit, which called for all parties in Burundi to work towards restoring peace and stability. According to a civil society actor affiliated with the ACTION Support Centre, the ICGLR has played an important role on Burundi at summit level and through partnerships with other states, the AU, SADC and international stakeholders.

The ICGLR, however, has largely been ineffective in dealing with Burundi's current crisis. A professor in international relations at the University of the Witwatersrand argues that the organisation is not cohesive because of its size, struggles with limited capacity and lacks diplomatic leverage. A professor at the University of Cape Town further highlights the organisation's lack of human and financial resources.

Arguably, the location of ICGLR's headquarters in Bujumbura has also negatively affected its responses and much-needed impartiality in addressing the peace and security challenges of its host country. Secretariat staff have been particularly vulnerable to attacks and reprisals. This influenced the ICGLR's decision to temporarily move its headquarters to Lusaka, Zambia following the escalation of violence in 2015 in Burundi.

This aggravated tensions between the government and the ICGLR, which resulted in ICGLR Secretary-General Ntumba Luaba being declared *persona non grata*.<sup>52</sup> The ICGLR therefore downsized its operations and maintains a small office in Bujumbura.

Consequently, the ICGLR's role in addressing the crisis in Burundi is marginal, especially in comparison with the mediation efforts carried out through the EAC, which – based on its formal status as a regional economic community within the African Peace and Security Architecture framework – has a more clearly defined role in Burundi.

Burundi has recently expressed interest in joining SADC.<sup>53</sup> The regional organisation is thus a possible actor through which South Africa could deepen its engagements with Burundi. Burundi's application could be a symbolic gesture to show its displeasure with the EAC, a strategic move to create a buffer against Rwanda's regional influence and counter visa restrictions. South Africa, however, has distanced itself from Burundi's application. SADC is still assessing the application, but given the country's current political and security environment, all indications point to accession being an unlikely outcome.

### Regional expectations

South Africa's leadership, credibility and moral authority<sup>54</sup> on peace and security issues across Africa have diminished over the past decade. Interviewees cited a number of factors that seem to contradict the country's stated pursuit of a principled and value-based foreign policy.

In addition, research findings indicate that inadequate public diplomacy and a lack of consistent, timely and articulate foreign policy statements on developments as they occur have compounded these perceptions.

South Africa is no longer seen to be actively playing the role of a continental human rights champion. Research findings indicate that regional actors have mixed perceptions of its present and potential future role as a committed peace and security stakeholder in Burundi.

SA's leadership and moral authority on peace and security has diminished over the past decade

Some commentators note that South Africa may slowly regain respectability during President Cyril Ramaphosa's tenure – if the government adopts a bolder and more principled foreign policy. At the same time, various Burundian interviewees maintained that South Africa's role in the Arusha Agreement continues to resonate with Burundians, and that South Africa still has significant political capital and credibility in Burundi.

Nkurunziza's statement in June 2018 on the departure of South African Ambassador Ephraim Oupa Monareng from the country reflected this sentiment,<sup>55</sup> reiterating

that the foundation of South Africa–Burundi relations is rooted in the role that Mandela and Zuma played in the peace process.

South Africa's successful transition to democracy, along with its progressive and human rights-based constitution, is thus a source of immense moral authority, despite more recent policy-level inconsistencies. This is reinforced by the significant role played by South African civil society actors in developing conflict management and peacebuilding capacity in Burundi, alongside South Africa's significant historical contributions to peacekeeping and mediation.

South Africa's familiarity with Burundi's conflict landscape was also cited as a key factor that resonates positively with regional actors, who expect the South African government to better mobilise this expertise to support Burundi's peace and security environment.

### Burundi was among the EAC's first opportunities to resolve a large-scale crisis in a member state

Moreover, South Africa's TRC has served as an effective model for TRC processes in post-conflict states across the continent, including Liberia and South Sudan. Accordingly, Burundi's TRC commissioners have worked with South African actors in preparation for the public hearings phase scheduled for 2019. However, these factors are tempered by perceptions that the South African government is sympathetic to Burundi's ruling party.

South Africa's outgoing ambassador to Burundi congratulated the country<sup>56</sup> for successfully holding a controversial referendum that may allow Nkurunziza to run for re-election in 2027. This endorsement could antagonise opposition actors, who have already boycotted the EAC's mediation talks owing to allegations of bias.

This antagonism is likely to be reinforced by Ambassador Jerry Matjila's June 2019 statement<sup>57</sup> to the UNSC in which he endorsed the Kayanza Road Map. South Africa's decision to acknowledge the government's Kayanza Road Map while ignoring the opposition and

civil society sponsored Entebbe Road Map on a prominent international platform is highly symbolic.

The perceptions of bias are reinforced by South Africa's position on a potential withdrawal from the Rome Statute, which came in the wake of Burundi's own threat to withdraw from the ICC.<sup>58</sup>

South Africa's economic profile has also influenced regional expectations that the government will promote investment and trade in Burundi and the region. This is significant because of expectations that Ramaphosa will pursue a more commercially oriented foreign policy approach, which prioritises economic diplomacy on the continent.<sup>59</sup>

Existing bilateral cooperation agreements could serve as key entry points and more easily facilitate commercial engagement with Burundi. This situation highlights the need for South Africa to strengthen the implementation of existing bilateral and multilateral economic agreements with Burundi, East Africa and the Great Lakes region.

Yet despite indications that regional actors expect South Africa to play a major role in resolving Burundi's political crisis, the research findings also indicate that certain East African actors hold lingering suspicions that South Africa could abuse its power in a region that is seen as outside its traditional sphere of influence.

Burundi's political crisis presented the EAC with one of its first opportunities to resolve a large-scale crisis in one of its member states. This implies that the EAC might not have welcomed South Africa's more active involvement as the crisis was emerging.

Now that the Inter-Burundi Dialogue process has in effect stalled, the EAC may welcome South Africa's greater initiative and potential intervention. However, this will need to be considered in the context of highly dynamic and complex regional political sensitivities.

### Summary of key considerations

Based on the research findings and analysis presented in this report, a number of key considerations can be identified and recommendations offered to explore how South Africa can deepen its engagements with Burundi to support the country's long-term peace, security and development.

## Leveraging political capital, credibility and technical expertise

It is apparent that, in light of South Africa's significant historical investment in supporting peace and security in Burundi, the country is still regarded as a credible, authoritative and respected actor by high-level Burundian officials and grassroots peace and security stakeholders.

South Africa should leverage this goodwill as a potential key entry point through which to engage the Burundian government, and seek assurances that the government will cooperate with concerned regional, continental and international peace and security actors. Similarly, South Africa could draw on the significant pool of expertise among the country's skilled personnel who directly contributed to Burundi's peace, security and stability from the late 1990s until the mid-2000s.

## Developing a holistic, overarching strategy

South Africa and Burundi share extensive existing bilateral cooperation arrangements, from economic cooperation to trade, education, health, sports diplomacy and peace and security. Accordingly, official bilateral engagements between the two countries have occurred across a wide array of government departments and stakeholders.

Further engagements with Burundi should be treated in a much more holistic and comprehensive manner, drawing seemingly disparate bilateral interactions into a common overarching strategy that supports the country's longer-term peace, security and development. Such a strategy should include semi-official and unofficial bilateral engagements, given the considerable interactions between and efforts of South African CSOs and private actors in Burundi.

## Navigating regional political dynamics and current initiatives

It is critically important for South African peace and security stakeholders to navigate the prevailing regional political dynamics with care. The same goes for regional initiatives aimed at addressing the instability in Burundi. East Africa is a particularly fractious environment in political terms, characterised by a great degree of complexity, suspicion and unresolved historical inter- and intra-state tensions.

South African peace and security stakeholders should ensure that any wider initiative or intervention concerning Burundi occurs in a well-coordinated manner that enjoys the buy-in and support of key regional actors. South Africa could use its current term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (2019–20), as well as its upcoming term as chair of the AU, to drive greater international consensus on how best to address long-term peace and security concerns in Burundi.

SA is still seen as credible by high-level Burundian officials and grassroots stakeholders

South Africa's role as chair of the UN Security Council's Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa should also be viewed as a key opportunity for the country to provide the kind of leadership expected of it in addressing regional peace and security concerns. By working through this subsidiary organ, alongside two other elected UN Security Council members (currently Côte d'Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea), South Africa could make a definitive contribution to how the international community approaches Burundi's peace and security concerns.

## Establishing a hierarchy of goals and priorities

The greatest impediment to long-term peace, security and development in Burundi is the current government's intransigent and uncooperative position on constructive engagement with concerned international peace and security stakeholders. Yet there may well be other, more immediate and tangible entry points South Africa could use to play a more meaningful role in the country.

Such entry points range from supporting the establishment and development of inclusive political institutions, to providing technical expertise for grassroots-level peacebuilding and transitional justice, to putting in place academic exchanges and confidence-building measures. These efforts should be coordinated and incorporated into a robust overarching strategy to ultimately affect the kind of change that is required to support long-term peace, security and development in Burundi.

## Conclusion

A stocktake of South African bilateral engagements with Burundi provides a picture of diverse and varied interactions that cut across a number of government departments and stakeholders, as well as civil society and private actors.

Many of these engagements have either led to, or benefitted from, existing bilateral cooperation agreements. Others have directly built on and effectively leveraged the deep historical relationship between the two countries, stemming from South Africa's considerable investment in and prioritisation of Burundi's peace and security environment.

While these engagements have, unsurprisingly, declined in recent years, there is a clear and identifiable basis on which to deepen future interactions. These interactions,

however, need to be well coordinated within a robust overarching strategy that is sensitive to regional political dynamics and directed according to a well-articulated hierarchy of goals and objectives.

There are also clear expectations that South Africa should play a more active and visible role as a committed and principled international peace and security actor, especially on the continent. This is despite certain lingering suspicions over the country's potential to abuse its relative power outside its perceived subregional sphere of influence.

Nevertheless, South African peace and security stakeholders should more carefully consider the various identifiable entry points through which to engage Burundi in support of its long-term peace, security and development.

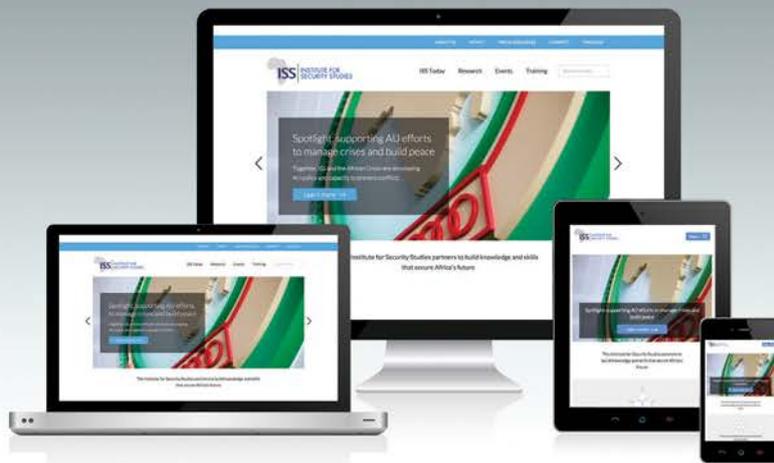
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### About the authors

Chido Mutangadura is a consultant in the Peace Operations and Peacebuilding programme at the ISS. She is a PhD Candidate at Nelson Mandela University, researching regional initiatives to prevent election-related violence in the run-up to Burundi's 2015 elections.

Priyal Singh is a researcher in the Peace Operations and Peacebuilding programme at the ISS. He has an MA with distinction in international relations from the University of the Witwatersrand.

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