

Global Governance Initiative and African Opportunities for Transformation and Security Sector Reform

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Abstract

This paper examines how contemporary global governance initiatives shape opportunities and constraints for transformational change and security sector reform (SSR) in Africa. Tracing developments from the international system through continental structures to national implementation, the analysis situates Africa's choices within a pluralized global order characterised by Western-led multilateral institutions, an emergent China-led governance architecture, and expanding multilateral platforms. The paper argues that Africa's best prospects for productive transformation and durable SSR derive from leveraging continental institutions to aggregate bargaining power, shaping partnerships to prioritize local ownership and human-security, and adopting integrated policies across productive, digital, land, food, genomic, and space governance domains. Policy recommendations are provided for African states, regional bodies, and external partners.

Keywords: *Global Governance, Global Governance Initiatives, African Opportunities, Transformation, Security Sector Reform*

Introduction

Global governance arrangements, institutions, norms, funding flows, and transnational initiatives, have long shaped the political economy and security environment of African states. For much of the post-colonial period, many African countries were marginal actors within Western-dominated multilateral orders and consequently experienced constraints on their capacity to shape rule-setting and resource allocation (Akande & Ojo, 2024; Shaw, 2018). The

past two decades, however, have seen substantial shifts in the international environment: the emergence of alternative governance vectors such as China's Global Development Initiative (GDI) and Global Security Initiative (GSI), the expansion of plurilateral platforms such as BRICS, and the increasing prominence of regional African institutions. These developments create a wider set of strategic choices for African leaders but also introduce coordination and normative complexity.

The term Global Governance Initiative (GGI) is the newly born concept in a series of philosophical inunciations by President Xi Jinping in what can be described as "growing China's influence from domestic to international." It is incremental in ambiance from the national policies of 'Reform and Opening Up,' 'Three Represents,' 'Scientific Development' and 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.' China began to go international as it pursues building a global community with a shared future for humanity. This came at a time when big powers envisage traditional policy of nationalism, protectionism and by exemplification, Trump's policy of "America First" which punishes the world (allies, neighbors and regional blocs). The series of international initiatives for a shared future constitute: the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative. These are apt, timely and what the international system requires to exhale. The need for security and development are vital, while mutual learning among civilizations is a tool to achieving global security and development. Global Governance Initiative, just like GCI, is also a tool to achieving global security and development. Global Governance Initiative is all encompassing in international politics as it dwells on:

Regulations intended for organization and centralization of human societies on a global scale. *Global governance* has also been defined as "the complex of formal and informal institutions, mechanisms, relationships, and processes between and among states, markets, citizens and organizations, both inter- and non-governmental, through which collective interests on the global plane are articulated, rights and obligations are established, and differences are mediated. President Xi Jinping inunciated the concept of GGI on the 2nd of September in Tianjin, China, calling on countries to work in concert for a more just and equitable global governance system. It was profounded in President Xi's address to world leaders, when chairing the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Plus" meeting in north China's port city of Tianjin, where the SCO held the largest summit in its 24-year history, attended by leaders from more than 20 countries and heads of 10 international organizations.

It was historical, philosophical and theoretically advanced to ensure inclusiveness, fairness, equity and rule of law in the international governance system. It is also a "cooperative problem-solving arrangement" of global governance that is formal, which takes the shape of laws or formally constituted institutions for a variety of actors (such as state authorities, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector entities, civil society actors) to manage collective affairs. It may also be informal (as in the case of practices or guidelines) or ad hoc entities (as in the case of coalitions). President Xi in his description of the ambiance of the GGI and what constitute its practicability, designated five major principles or fetures of the GGI and what it seeks to achieve, which are namely, adhering to sovereign equality of states, abiding by international rule of law, practicing multilateralism among states, advocating the people-centered approach, and focusing on taking real actions. The Shanghai Cooperation

Organization's Tianjin Summit has come to reveal the true imagery and political personality of President Xi Jinping: a problem solver, a leader and the only world leader that plans for the world what the world desires. Not only advocating for the GGI, but a call for immediate action to adopt it and implement its principles for a better international system.

President Xi in this theoretical and philosophical exploit, has fulfilled all the complexities of international governance which ideally deal with: agenda setting, policy making, implementation and enforcement, and finally, evaluation, monitoring and adjudication. President Xi has set up the agenda, has formulated it as an international policy, and called for its implementation, which by extension, will be monitored and evaluated. President Xi has also brought out the rationale behind this initiative when he argued that: "while the historical trends of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit remain unchanged, the Cold War mentality, hegemonism and protectionism continue to haunt the world...new threats and challenges have been only increasing, and the world has found itself in a new period of turbulence and transformation." consequently, "global governance has come to a new crossroads," President Xi designated. President Xi posited that, this year marks the 80th anniversary of the victory in the World Anti-Fascist War and the founding of the United Nations. He recommended vehemently the move towards safeguarding the status and authority of the UN, and ensuring its irreplaceable and key role in global governance. In other areas of recommendation, President Xi stressed that: all countries, regardless of size, strength and wealth, are equal participants, decision-makers, and beneficiaries in global governance. "There should be no double standards, and the house rules of a few countries must not be imposed upon others," Xi noted.

The birth of the GGI is not an idea for China alone, but a framework of action for the entire world. President Xi is not only a Chinese leader, but a leader to the world, exhibited in his character, personality and resolve to solving global problems for humanity. It is to this effect that President Xi urged efforts to better tackle the common challenges for mankind, better narrow the North-South gap, and better safeguard the common interests of all countries. In the institutional framework for implementation, there has to be a leading institution in the delivery of the principles of the GGI. In line with this, President Xi obliged that the SCO should step up to play a leading role and set an example in carrying out the GGI, and remain a force for stability in this volatile world. Founded in Shanghai in June 2001, the SCO has expanded from six founding members to Ten member states currently, which is called the SCO+. The current Ten member states are: China, Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Belarus. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has turned into the world's largest regional organization with cooperation covering more than 50 areas and a combined economic output of nearly 30 trillion U.S. dollars.

The GGI is exclusively hinged on building a global community with a shared future for humanity, devoid of domination, exclusion and hegemonic tendencies. This is evident in President Xi's speech when he urged the organization to push for open cooperation across the globe. "We should continue to dismantle walls, not erect them; we should seek integration, not decoupling. We should advance high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, and push for a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization." In Global Governance, sharing benefits and cooption of others remains key to global leadership and effective governance. That is why China under President Xi believes in a shared future and inclusiveness. President Xi

highlighted at the SCO summit that, China will readily share the opportunities of its vast market, and continue to implement the action plan for high-quality development of economic and trade cooperation within the SCO family. China's investment stock in other SCO member states has exceeded 84 billion U.S. dollars, and its annual bilateral trade with other SCO member states has surpassed 500 billion U.S. dollars. In particular, Xi mentioned sharing the dividends of progress in artificial intelligence. He also invited countries with relevant capacities to take part in the International Lunar Research Station project.

This paper traces global governance dynamics and their implications for Africa, examines continental agency, particularly the role of the African Union (AU) and regional economic communities (RECs), and assesses national-level constraints and opportunities for security sector reform (SSR) and broader transformation. The analysis integrates scholarship on SSR, development cooperation, and institutional reform and draws on recent empirical evidence and policy literature to propose operational recommendations. The objective is to present an integrated framework that ties global governance initiatives to practical pathways for African-led transformation and accountable security governance.

Literature review

Theoretical perspectives on global governance and agency

The literature on global governance emphasizes institutional design, power asymmetries, and normative diffusion. Early scholarship emphasized the dominance of Western states in structuring international institutions and the normative frameworks they advance (Shaw, 2018). More recent contributions have stressed the plurality of governance actors and the consequent need to account for contestation among state and non-state actors (Tieku & Gelot, 2017). From an African perspective, scholars argue that agency is not merely reactive: African states, regional organizations, and civil society can exercise meaningful influence by aggregating interests, engaging in norm entrepreneurship, and leveraging strategic partnerships (Mabera, 2019; Akande & Ojo, 2024).

Security sector reform scholarship: ownership, sequencing, and political settlements

The SSR literature foregrounds local ownership, sequencing of reform activities, and the political settlement environment as determinants of success (Bagayoko & Hutchful, 2022). Bagayoko & Hutchful (2022) highlights the difficulty of transplanting externally designed SSR models onto states with entrenched security cultures and politicized militaries. Akemu et al. (2025) proposes an Afrocentric constitutional approach that emphasizes human security and the social contract between citizens and security institutions. Comparative studies of post-conflict SSR in Liberia and Sierra Leone underscore that parliamentary oversight, inclusive transitional justice mechanisms, and community engagement are critical to preventing relapse into violence.

Donor practices and the "train-and-equip" critique

A recurrent theme in the literature is the dominance of "train-and-equip" approaches, which focus on immediate operational capacity rather than systemic governance. Critics argue that such approaches can inadvertently strengthen military autonomy, foster dependency, and neglect accountability mechanisms (Bagayoko & Hutchful, 2022). Effective SSR, therefore,

requires sequencing that privileges legal and institutional reform, budget transparency, and civilian oversight before large-scale procurement and capability transfers.

China, BRICS, and the diffusion of alternative governance models

A growing body of work examines China's role in reshaping development and security governance in Africa (He, 2025; Li & Qi, 2025). This literature highlights several patterns: first, China's strategies often emphasize infrastructure and capacity-building with limited overt political conditionality; second, Chinese security cooperation, including training and maritime partnerships, introduces new instruments of external influence that interact with local governance environments; third, initiatives like the BRI, GDI, and GSI expand the set of feasible development pathways for African states. Scholars caution, however, that while these partnerships can deliver tangible benefits, they pose fiscal, environmental, and governance risks that require robust domestic regulatory frameworks (Li & Qi, 2025).

Regionalism and the African Union's normative role

The AU and RECs constitute a principal focus in Africanist governance literature. Nash (2023) documents how the AU and Africa CDC exercised leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, asserting continental priorities and coordinating procurement and policy. This emerging record of continental agency suggests that the AU can serve as a platform for norm diffusion and bargaining with external partners (Tieku & Gelot, 2017). Studies of AU normative entrepreneurship argue for strengthening implementation capacity and financing mechanisms to translate continental frameworks, such as Agenda 2063, into enforceable national reforms (Mabera, 2019; Akande & Ojo, 2024).

Transformation literatures: productive, digital, land, food systems, genomics, and space
Productive transformation scholarship emphasizes industrial policy, regional value chains, and public investments that catalyse structural change. African economies show heterogenous capacities for such transformation, and policy design must reflect regional and sectoral specificities. Digital governance literature highlights e-governance as a tool for transparency and anti-corruption, with country cases like Nigeria showing both successes and vulnerabilities tied to infrastructure and legal readiness (Ojo, 2021). Studies on land and food systems underscore the importance of tenure security, climate adaptation, and institutional coordination to reduce conflict and improve productivity. Genomics governance literature warns against extractive research practices and advocates for equitable data-sharing frameworks grounded in African ethical principles (Sunday, 2021). Space governance research identifies satellite applications as critical for agriculture and disaster management, but emphasizes the need for pooled continental capacity to avoid dependence on external providers (Haruna, Alhassan, Emmanuel & Onwe, 2025; Oyewole, 2024).

Civil society, public accountability, and normative diffusion

Civil society emerges across the literature as a corrective to state capture and a promoter of accountability (Tieku & Gelot, 2017). Civil society organizations (CSOs), media, and parliamentary committees can monitor security sector behavior, expose corruption, and mobilize public support for reform. However, CSOs often face legal and financial constraints that limit their effectiveness; strengthening the enabling environment for civic engagement is therefore a priority for sustainable governance (Mabera, 2019).

Synthesis of literature and identified gaps

A synthesis of the literature reveals convergent themes: the necessity of local ownership for SSR; the potential and perils of diversified external partnerships; the centrality of continental institutions for norm-setting; and the cross-sectoral nature of transformation. Notable gaps remain: comparative empirical studies assessing the long-term governance outcomes of Chinese-led initiatives; systematic evaluations of AU normative implementation across member states; and research on the interaction between digital governance reforms and SSR outcomes. Filling these gaps would help practitioners design interventions that better align global governance initiatives with African-led transformation agendas.

Global governance architecture: plurality, competition, and normative divergence

Historical context and Western-dominated governance

The post-World War II multilateral order evolved with a core of Western-led institutions, the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, and an array of bilateral donors, that shaped global policy norms, financing modalities, and technical assistance priorities. Many of these institutions prioritized liberal democratic governance, human-rights conditionality, and market-based development models. African states often found themselves constrained by structural asymmetries in representation and agenda-setting, a legacy that continues to inform contemporary debates over institutional reform, including proposals for changes to the United Nations Security Council (Alene et al., 2023).

Alternative governance vectors: China, BRICS, and diversified partnerships Parallel to the established Western-led architecture, China and other emerging actors have mobilized new governance initiatives that emphasize infrastructure financing, development cooperation, and security partnerships without overt political conditionality (He, 2025). The GDI and GSI, in particular, present a framework that foregrounds infrastructure, capacity building, and “win-win” cooperation, attributes welcomed by many African governments seeking rapid capital and implementation. BRICS expansion further complicates the landscape by offering alternative coordination platforms and influencing debates over global financial governance and regulation (You, 2024).

Continental responses: AU leadership and regional security governance

African Union normative entrepreneurship and public-health leadership

The AU has progressively sought to translate pan-African aspirations, codified in Agenda 2063, into sectoral governance frameworks and programmatic initiatives. A salient illustration is the AU and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which demonstrated the continent’s capacity to coordinate procurement, surveillance, and policy alignment for public health (Nash, 2023). This “New Public Health Order” underscores the potential for continental institutions to aggregate bargaining power and influence global governance debates, thereby enhancing African agency in international health governance.

Regional security governance and institutional frameworks for SSR

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and sub-regional bodies have developed mechanisms for peace and security, including protocols for collective security, peace operations, and increasingly, normative frameworks for SSR. The AU Peace and Security Council and specialized SSR guidance documents promote human-security oriented approaches that emphasise civilian oversight, constitutionalism, and community engagement (Knight & Oriola, 2020). Nonetheless, implementation remains uneven, constrained by differential institutional capacity across states, limited funding for sustained reform, and the persistence of donor-driven “train-and-equip” paradigms that emphasize immediate tactical capacity over structural governance reforms (Bagayoko & Hutchful, 2022).

National-level dynamics: political settlements, SSR, and the political economy of reform

Historical legacies and security sector composition

Post-colonial security institutions were often configured to secure nascent states and protect ruling coalitions, embedding liberation-era hierarchies and patronage networks that continue to shape security sector behaviour (Akemu et al., 2025). Consequently, SSR efforts that fail to account for the underlying political settlement and the vested interests of powerful actors are prone to partial uptake or reversal. Successful reform is therefore contingent upon realistic political economy analysis and the inclusion of mechanisms to reorient security institutions toward citizen protection and democratic accountability.

Donor modalities, sequencing, and ownership

International assistance for SSR typically includes training, equipment, and institution-building. While these elements can enhance operational capability, they produce limited sustainable governance outcomes if not sequenced with legal reforms, oversight strengthening, and transparent budgeting. Comparative studies of post-conflict SSR in West Africa demonstrate that programmes achieve better outcomes when national authorities, parliaments, and civil society organizations exercise meaningful ownership and when donor support emphasizes long-term institutional development.

Sectoral transformation and governance domains

Productive transformation and industrial policy

Productive transformation, moving from resource- and low-value goods dependence toward diversified industrial production, remains central to long-term development prospects. Policy instruments include targeted industrial policies, regional value chain integration, and active public investment in infrastructure that enables private-sector competitiveness. The AU’s Agenda 2063 informs continental objectives while partnership models (including those under the Belt and Road Initiative) can provide critical infrastructure financing; however, agreements must include provisions for technology transfer, local content, and fiscal sustainability to avoid debt and governance pitfalls.

Digital transformation and e-governance

Digital technologies offer large returns for governance and service delivery, improving revenue mobilization, reducing rent-seeking, and enhancing transparency (Ojo, 2021). Nigeria’s experience with e-governance demonstrates both potential and pitfalls: where digital platforms

were supported by legal frameworks and institutional capacity, gains in transparency were more evident; where infrastructure and cyber-resilience were weak, vulnerabilities emerged. Digital tax reform and e-governance strategies must therefore be tailored to national capacities and accompanied by investment in legal frameworks, cybersecurity, and human capital (Hamza et al., 2025).

Food systems, land policy, and environmental governance

Transforming food systems requires more than technical agricultural interventions; it demands systemic governance reform that addresses land tenure complexity, market inefficiencies, and climate resilience. Land reform policies must reconcile customary and statutory tenure systems, strengthen land administration, and implement dispute-resolution mechanisms. Coordinated continental strategies can provide guidance and funding modalities for climate-smart agriculture and regional market integration.

Genomics governance and equitable research partnerships

As genomics moves to the foreground of global health innovation, African states must ensure research governance frameworks protect data sovereignty and ensure equitable benefit-sharing. African bioethics rooted in Ubuntu can inform principles that guide partnerships and encourage capacity building for domestic research institutions (Sunday, 2021). Investments in continental research consortia and harmonized regulatory frameworks will reduce extractive research practices and align scientific advances with local health priorities.

Space governance and satellite applications

The application of space-derived data for agriculture, climate monitoring, and disaster early warning presents high developmental value. To capitalize on these benefits, African states and the AU must develop sustainable financing mechanisms, institutional capacities for data analysis, and regulatory frameworks that govern satellite procurement and data sharing (Haruna et al., 2025; Oyewole, 2024). Pooling capability at the regional level can lower costs and increase access to space-derived services.

Interaction effects: normative diffusion, conditionality, and human-rights considerations

Diversified partners and bargaining leverage

The proliferation of external partners increases competition for African markets and influence, allowing states to bargain for improved terms. Nonetheless, divergent governance models require African actors to set clear continental standards to prevent a race to the bottom on governance provisions and human-rights safeguards (Li & Qi, 2025; He, 2025).

Norm diffusion and institutional consistency Different external actors advance distinct governance prescriptions; African institutions must pursue harmonized regulatory frameworks to mitigate fragmentation. The AU and RECs can play a central role by setting minimum standards for procurement, transparency, public health, and SSR that partners must adhere to when operating continental programmes (Nash, 2023).

Human-rights safeguards in security cooperation Security assistance that lacks embedded human-rights training and civilian oversight can inadvertently legitimize repressive practices. African governments should insist that all security cooperation, including Chinese training

programmes and equipment transfers, include explicit curricula on human rights, parliamentary oversight provisions, and monitoring mechanisms (Bagayoko & Hutchful, 2022; He, 2025).

Policy recommendations

1. Strengthen continental normative frameworks and implementation capacity: The AU should consolidate and operationalize sectoral governance standards across health, SSR, digital taxation, procurement, genomics, and space governance. By aligning donor and partner investments with continental norms, African states can ensure external funding advances domestic reform priorities (Nash, 2023).
2. Anchor SSR in national ownership and sequencing: Donor programmes should require national SSR roadmaps co-created with parliaments and civil society. Emphasis must be placed on legal reform, oversight, and transparent budgeting before major procurements and capability transfers.
3. Leverage diversified finance for capability transfer, not dependency: States negotiating infrastructure or security agreements should demand explicit technology transfer, skills development, and procurement transparency. Fiscal risk assessments and medium-term expenditure frameworks will protect long-term sustainability (Alene *et al.*, 2022).
4. Mainstream digital governance to enhance transparency: Invest in e-governance platforms with robust legal frameworks, cybersecurity plans, and capacity development for public servants and civil society to reduce corruption vulnerabilities and increase service efficiency (Ojo, 2021).
5. Integrate transformation policies through cross-ministerial compacts: Ministerial silos undermine systemic reforms. Cross-ministerial “transformation compacts” tied to Agenda 2063 and measurable SDG targets can coordinate policy across productive, land, food, digital, and scientific domains.
6. Empower legislatures and civil society for oversight: Donor and continental support should include capacity building for parliamentary oversight, budget scrutiny, and civic monitoring mechanisms that ensure SSR and transformation initiatives remain accountable (Shaw, 2018).
7. Insist on human-rights conditionality in security cooperation: All security partnerships must contain enforceable commitments to human-rights training, civilian oversight, and external monitoring to prevent negative governance externalities (Bagayoko & Hutchful, 2022).

Conclusion

Africa’s contemporary governance environment is characterized by an expanding array of global initiatives and external partners. This pluralized international order presents meaningful opportunities for the continent to secure financial resources, technology, and alternative models of cooperation. However, to translate these opportunities into durable transformation and accountable security sector reform, African actors must strengthen continental institutions, insist on local ownership and sequencing in SSR, negotiate capability transfer in financing agreements, and mainstream governance reforms across sectors.

The AU’s recent leadership in public health demonstrates the potential for continental entities to shape global governance outcomes in ways that reflect African priorities. The central policy

challenge is to institutionalize that leadership into operational mechanisms that produce measurable results at national levels. If African states effectively align continental norms, parliamentary oversight, and diversified partnerships with an emphasis on human security and societal transformation, they can harness global governance initiatives as instruments of autonomous development and accountable security governance.

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