

Navigating Justice, Peace, and Development in Africa: A Multidisciplinary Exploration

Prof. Dan Kuwali

AFRICAN PEACEBUILDING NETWORK
APN LECTURE SERIES: NO.20



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Launched in March 2012, the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) supports independent African research on conflict-affected countries and neighboring regions of the continent, as well as the integration of high-quality African research-based knowledge into global policy communities. In order to advance African debates on peacebuilding and promote African perspectives, the APN offers competitive research grants and fellowships, and it funds other forms of targeted support, including strategy meetings, seminars, grantee workshops, commissioned studies, and the publication and dissemination of research findings. In doing so, the APN also promotes the visibility of African peacebuilding knowledge among global and regional centers of scholarly analysis and practical action and makes it accessible to key policymakers at the United Nations and other multilateral, regional, and national policymaking institutions.

ABOUT THE SERIES

The APN Lecture Series provides an avenue for influential thinkers, practitioners, policy makers, and activists to reflect on and speak to the critical issues and challenges facing African peacebuilding. This publication series documents lectures given on the platform of the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) program, and its institutional partners. These lectures provide an analysis of processes, institutions, and mechanisms for, as well as the politics of, peacebuilding on the continent, and contribute towards broadening debates and knowledge about the trajectories of conflict and peace in conflict-affected African countries and regions. The APN Lecture series seeks to address knowledge gaps in African peace and security, including its links to local, national, and global structures and processes. These publications also provide critical overviews and innovative reflections on the state of the field, including new thinking critical to knowledge production and dissemination in overlooked or emerging areas of African peacebuilding.

Navigating Justice, Peace, and Development in Africa: A Multidisciplinary Exploration

Prof. Dan Kuwali

Keynote Address by Brig Gen (Prof) Dan Kuwali at the African Peacebuilding Network and Next Generation Writing and Dissemination Workshop, Social Science Research Network, Amaryllis Hotel, Blantyre, 24 February 2025.

September 2025

It is both a profound honour and a humbling privilege to stand before you today at this crucial and timely workshop to reflect, learn, and share the fruits of rigorous intellectual labor on the question of overcoming the obstacles in writing on justice, peace, and development in Africa, from an interdisciplinary angle. We should add corruption to the list. I am even more delighted to link up with my mentor, Dr Cyril OBI, who hosted me in his office and at his home when I was a Doctoral Fellow at the Nordic African Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, back in 2007/8. Thank you, Cyril, for your hospitality and Pan-African stewardship.

Esteemed Colleagues, as we embark on this journey of intellectual exploration, I want to begin by recalling an African proverb that beautifully encapsulates the complexity of our undertaking: “Wisdom is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it.” This timeless wisdom calls us to recognize that the issues of justice, peace, and development in Africa are too vast and multidimensional to be understood from a single viewpoint. It encourages us to embrace diverse perspectives and methodologies, drawing from a variety of disciplines to tackle these challenges, including indigenous perspectives, as Dr Ignasio JIMU and Dr Atikonda MTENJE-MKOCHI would testify.

Distinguished Scholars, how do we explain the fact that there is no major weapon factory on the continent, yet Africa remains the world’s largest dumping ground for arms and ammunition? How do we reconcile the fact that Africa boasts the highest number of peacekeepers, yet it also endures the most conflicts globally? How do we reconcile the fact that Africa--with its vast land, perennial sunshine, and massive water bodies--has the world's largest youth population and agriculture, yet is home to the world’s poorest, who suffer from acute food insecurity? This shows the magnitude of the work that lies ahead for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners on the continent.

It cannot be denied that justice, peace, and development are the triumvirate of African aspirations. Justice, peace, and development are the pillars upon which Africa’s future rests. Yet they are also some of the most elusive and debated concepts on the continent.

From the beaches of Lake Malawi, through the savannahs of the Serengeti, via the urban streets of Lagos, up to the rugged terrain of the Sahel overlooking the Horn of Africa, Africans yearn for a future where justice reigns, where peace prevails, and where development is not just an ideal, but a tangible reality. However, as we all know, the road toward these ideals is fraught with complexities that demand far more than simplistic answers or singular academic approaches.

I should commend you for researching and writing on this important field of study. However, more focus should be placed on the question of how to sustain the peace prevailing in developing countries such as Malawi. So, we need to promote more research on good governance, including how to win the fight against grand corruption, strengthening the rule of law, spurring economic development and inclusive growth, building strong institutions, and fostering regional cooperation, including intra-regional trade, especially the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

One might wonder: what challenges do we face when writing on these issues? The answer is clear. Africa is a continent rich in history, diversity, and culture. Yet, it is also burdened by layers of colonial legacies, socio-political struggles, economic disparities, and environmental crises. To capture these challenges and the pathways toward their resolution, we must employ a multidisciplinary approach. There are no simple answers, no one-size-fits-all solutions. It requires the confluence of social sciences, political science, economics, philosophy, law, history, and many other disciplines to unravel the intricate fabric of Africa's aspirations for justice, peace, and development. Multidisciplinary lenses and the pursuit of collective solutions are key to addressing the multitude of complex challenges facing the continent today.

Esteemed Colleagues, justice is not merely the absence of oppression but the equitable distribution of opportunities and resources. Peace is not only the absence of conflict but the presence of harmonious coexistence and mutual respect among diverse peoples. Development is not solely about economic growth, but also about enhancing human dignity, elevating lives, and promoting the sustainable prosperity of the continent.

As researchers, scholars, and students of letters, we are tasked with the responsibility of weaving these multifaceted ideas into narratives that speak to Africa's complex reality. One single approach would be insufficient. "A single bracelet does not jingle," says a West African proverb that reminds us of the power of collaboration. The challenge of writing on these themes demands collaboration across disciplines, universities, think tanks, communities, and nations. Thus, the establishment of the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) is a step in the right direction.

No doubt, you will agree that the African experience is a rich tapestry of stories. We must also remember that the African story is not one monolithic narrative. It is a mosaic of diverse histories, languages, cultures, and philosophies that shape how justice, peace, and development are understood and pursued. As scholars, we have a sacred duty to understand and respect these differences and to ensure that our research reflects the lived realities of African people. More importantly, our research and publications should be accessible to our communities, especially the 80 percent of Africans who live in rural areas.

It is here that African philosophy plays a crucial role. The idea of Ubuntu, which means “I am because we are,” teaches us that development and peace cannot be achieved in isolation. They require interconnectedness, cooperation, and a shared sense of humanity. Our research must reflect these principles, highlighting that justice is not only an individual right but a collective responsibility.

One challenge to academic writing is the fact that the languages we use in the academy — the languages of scholarship — are not our mother tongues. Whether it is English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, or Arabic, these are all foreign to us. But let me tell you, there is progress. The African Union (AU) has taken a step forward by embracing Kiswahili as one of its official languages. Now, that is something to celebrate.

I am not saying that we should be writing in the vernacular. Neither am I advocating that we should abandon our vernacular. Rather, I am charging you to be the best in your field and not play second fiddle. It is troubling that non-Africans write some of the most prominent books on our continent. But we have seen the difference that one person can make. Think about Kenya’s Ali MAZRUI, a great son of this soil, who saved face for us with his seminal work, *Pax Africana*, back in 1967. We need more of that — more scholars writing our story, shaping our future. Equally critical is the need to cite each other’s work. It is saddening to observe that the bulk of the prescribed and recommended textbooks in our curricula are those originating from outside the continent. Yet we know better as we live in communities where people are suffering, and we see the evidence firsthand.

Now, I will be the first to admit that we cannot take on the superpowers in a physical confrontation—those who are armed to the teeth. But if the pen is still mightier than the sword, we have a fighting chance. A chance to contribute to scholarship and shape the narrative is vital. If you do not know how, ask Professor Address MALATA, the first female Professor in Malawi. She is a renowned academic and healthcare professional, particularly noted for her work in nursing education and public health globally. Remember this: in academia, it is simple—you either publish or perish. Let us not forget what our forefathers said: “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.” Therefore, I urge you to research, write, publish, and achieve your goals.

As we say in Malawi, “Rats do not dance at the same time, but when they do, the cat must beware.” Therefore, we must unite across disciplines and collaborate to shape a future in Africa where justice, peace, and development are interwoven and where the safety and dignity of every individual are upheld more than anything else — leaving behind the legacy of violence in our communities and building a continent of lasting harmony.

We stand at the threshold of an exciting era for African scholarship, where our research has the potential to influence policy, drive change, and shape the future. We must never lose sight of our mission, which is to make tangible contributions to the creation of a just, peaceful, and developed Africa. The fruits of our labor today may not ripen immediately, but like the trees planted long ago, they will one day provide shade and nourishment for generations to come. In any event, with the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the availability and analysis of data have been made easy. Nonetheless, as Mr Caleb GICHUHI will inform us later in this workshop, we should be mindful that although AI in academic research and writing can enhance efficiency and provide valuable insights, it may also risk promoting dependency, reducing originality, and introducing biases if not used critically. Hence, we should not drop the guardrails of our academic rigor and critical synthesis in the face of AI.

As you embark on your research journey, I urge you to approach the complexities of justice, peace, and development in Africa with a multidisciplinary lens. The challenges we face are deeply interconnected—social, political, and economic factors do not exist in isolation, and your work must reflect that. Whether you are examining the roots of conflict, the frameworks of peacebuilding, or the pathways to sustainable development, your analysis should draw from various disciplines — history, political science, economics, sociology, and even environmental studies.

Distinguished Academics, do not be afraid to challenge existing paradigms and consider how African contexts shape global theories and vice versa. Remember, the solutions to Africa’s challenges are not unidimensional, nor should your research be. Besides all these, Professor MALATA is a phenomenal woman, a thought leader, and a transformational leader. Your writing should aim to understand and propose innovative and practical solutions rooted in the realities and aspirations of the African people. This is an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to a continent on the rise, so make your work bold, interdisciplinary, and transformative.

Africa’s resilience is the root of its promise. Despite the challenges, the continent continues to rise, reinvent itself, and reassert its presence on the global stage. From the shores of the Mediterranean to the heart of the Congo Basin, African states are proving that peace and development are achievable, even in the face of adversity.

As researchers, we must draw inspiration from this resilience, for it is not just a theme in our research — it is the spirit of Africa itself.

Esteemed Colleagues, I have often wondered: if Africa is the continent most tormented by wars, why do we lack centers of excellence for dispute resolution and diplomacy? But then I realized that we should not engage in blame games, as charity begins at home. So, I have tried to develop what I call a tiered war termination theory (TWTT). The thinking is that if war arises from deep-rooted causes, it is triggered by immediate proximate factors, and is exacerbated by external actors or factors, then resolving an armed conflict requires a phased approach. First, removing or withdrawing external factors and actors is essential to eliminating foreign influence that may prolong or intensify the conflict. Next, inducements or compelling incentives should be used to address and mitigate the proximate causes, effectively halting the immediate triggers of violence. Finally, a conducive environment must be created to enable all parties to address the underlying root causes through dialogue, reform, and reconciliation, ensuring sustainable peace. I challenge you to test the theoretical framework.

It is pleasing to note that the African School of Governance (ASG) was established in October 2024 and is located in Kigali, Rwanda. As you may be aware, this is a graduate institution dedicated to developing future leaders across Africa who are skilled in governance and public policy. The ASG will also act as a base to wage the war against corruption on the continent. Talking about corruption, I published an edited volume titled *Corruption Proofing in Africa: A Systems Thinking Approach*. In the book, we noted that combating corruption through prosecution was ineffective. The deterrence of affluent kleptomaniacs has not worked, as they can corrupt the legal system. Hence, we advocated for a systematic approach towards de-incentivizing corruption and incentivizing anticorruption. To achieve this, we should commend ethical conduct and condemn corrupt behaviour to instill a culture of integrity in both the public and private sectors.

The structural conditions that underpin the transition of youth from childhood to adulthood can, at times, inadvertently propel people toward violence, often culminating in acts of impunity and atrocity crimes. In many instances, weak governance, fragile political systems, entrenched grievances, and competition for scarce resources are significant drivers of such violent outcomes. To mitigate these risks, African states must prioritize the implementation of five critical transitions essential for fostering the well-being of youth: access to quality education, sustainable employment opportunities, the adoption of positive and progressive lifestyles, the establishment of stable family structures, and the active exercise of citizenship. These foundational elements are not merely aspirations; they are essential for nurturing resilient, empowered, and responsible young citizens who are capable of making meaningful contributions to society.

We also need to make agriculture attractive for young people to engage in farming and agribusiness, thereby reducing unemployment.

As I conclude, I would like to leave you with the words of the late Kenyan philosopher and leader, Mzee Jomo KENYATTA, who wisely said: “The task of leadership is not to be easy, but to be enduring.” The same can be said for research and scholarship. The journey toward justice, peace, and development may not be easy, but it is one that we must persist in, with endurance, courage, and commitment. As you ascend the ladder of your professional career, you will become a leader, and you will need to lead by example. In this case, let us also remember the words of the former Vice President of the Republic of Malawi, the late Right Honorable Dr Saulos Klaus CHILIMA, “leadership is not about being in charge. It is about taking care of those in your charge.” In this vein, we can emulate the example of Dr Cyril Obi, who always leads from the front. We should also be inspired by my favorite Malawian Law Professor, Fidelis Edge KANYONGOLO, who believes that “intellectual humility ignites thoughtful curiosity,” one that seeks understanding rather than mere answers.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let us then embrace the challenge of researching and writing on these vital issues, not with the mindset of conquering them, but with the humility of understanding that we are but contributors in a long line of scholars, activists, and thinkers who have come before us. My Grandmother, a NyaMsuku, used to remind us that “wisdom is like fire. People carry it from one place to another.” Today, we are tasked with carrying that fire forward, lighting the way for future generations.

Thank you for your attention, and may this workshop be a beacon of hope, inspiration, and intellectual collaboration toward a brighter future for Africa.

Kwaba! Zikomo! Asante!

ABOUT THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Professor Dan Kuwali serves in the Malawi Defence Force as Commandant of the National Defence College with the rank of Brigadier General. He is a former Chief of Legal Services and Judge Advocate General.

Professor Kuwali is a Senior Research Fellow at the African Institute of South Africa(AISA), Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). After reading for his Bachelor of Laws degree with honors at the University of Malawi, he studied for a Master's degree in International Law with distinction at the University of Lund in Sweden, where he also earned his doctoral degree in the same field, "eximia cum laude approbatur." He is a Distinguished Fellow of the United States (U.S.) Army War College, where he was honored as a Carlisle Scholar. He is a graduate of the Judge Advocate General School (TJAGSA) and the Defence Institute of International Legal Studies (DIILS), and the prestigious Center for America and International Law (CAIL) in Plano, Texas. Brig Gen Kuwali is the Chairperson of the Malawi National International Humanitarian Committee. As an academic, he is a Visiting Professor at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Lund University. He is also an Extraordinary Professor of International Law at the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, South Africa; Senior Research Fellow, at Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Adjunct Professor and Founding Executive Director, Centre of Strategic Studies, Malawi University of Science and Technology; Distinguished Professor of Law, University of Lilongwe, Malawi; Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government; Immediate Past President of the Governing Council of the African Military Law Forum (AMLF) and its founding member; and Executive Member of the African Bar Association (AfBA).

He has served as Division Legal Advisor, United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), among other think tanks. His publications include: Corruption Proofing in Africa: A Systems Thinking Approach (2024), The Palgrave Handbook of Sustainable Peace and Security in Africa(2022); "Forceful Intervention for Protection of Human Rights in Africa - International Law" - Oxford Bibliographies (2020; By All Means Necessary: Protecting Civilians and Preventing Atrocities in Africa (2017); Africa and the Responsibility to Protect: Article 4(h) of the African Union (2016); and scores of other peer-reviewed monographs, book chapters, and articles and blogs.