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Piercing Through the Dust of War: Comparing the operationalisation of local ownership in UN-led and African-led peackeeping operations

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PIERCING THROUGH THE DUST OF WAR:

Comparing the operationalisation of local ownership in UN-led and African-led peacekeeping operations

22-05-2024

DISSERTATION

Advanced Master of Science "International Relations and Diplomacy"

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DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO HAVE SUFFERED AND CONTINUE TO SUFFER AMIDST THE UNRELENTING EXPLOITATION, MARGINALISATION, AND UNJUSTIFIED LOSS OF LIFE IN MALI AND THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO.

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Abstract

Piercing through the dust of wars in Sub-Saharan Africa has become increasingly difficult for peacekeeping operations. UN-led and regionally-led operations in this region face increasing challenges due to the evolving dynamics of intrastate conflicts and the inability of these organisations to adapt, leading to intensified violence and rising civilian casualties. The concept of local ownership in peacebuilding has gained traction over the decades as a response to these challenges but remains inadequately implemented and formulated in contemporary peacekeeping operations. This thesis conducts a focused structured comparison of two case studies in Sub-Saharan Africa – Mali and the DRC – to examine how specific approaches to local ownership influence the effectiveness of these peacekeeping operations. The findings reveal several overarching limitations in current approaches to local ownership in both UN-led and regionally-led missions, as well as some country- and region-specific issues. The key limitations include a severe lack of inter-organisational cooperation and communication, the apparent inability of peacekeeping operations to adapt to the rapidly changing nature of conflicts, failure to integrate various levels of governance in local ownership projects, and the tendency to view local ownership as a means to an end rather than part of a comprehensive framework for sustainable peace. This research contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the challenges faced by both the UN and regional organisations in transitioning from UN-dominated peacekeeping to regional ownership of these missions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Local ownership; Peacekeeping operations; United Nations; African-led; Mali; the Democratic Republic of Congo

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
AU-PSC	African Union Peace and Security Council
CAR	Central African Republic
CMA	Coordination of Azawad Movements
CNDP	National Congress for the Defense of the People
CODECO	Cooperative for Development of the Congo
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration
DDR/RR-CVR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration, Repatriation, Resettlement, and Community Violence Reduction
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAC	East African Community
EACRF	East African Community Regional Force
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
EUCAP	European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali
EUTM	European Union Training Mission in Mali
FARDC	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
FC-G5S	G5 Sahel Joint Force
FDLR	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda
FRPI	Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri
FSC	Focus Structured Comparison
GLR	Great Lakes Region

HIPPO	Independent High-Level Panel on Peace Operations
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
IRF	Immediate Response Facility
M23	March 23 Movement
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
MONUC	United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUSCO	United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OPPA	Ouagadougou Preliminary Peace Agreement
P5	Permanent-5
PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
PKO	Peacekeeping operation
UN	United Nations
UN-DPO	United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
REC	Regional Economic Community
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SADC	Southern African Development Community

SAMIDRC	Southern African Development Community Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
SGBV	Sexual- and Gender-Based Violence
SSR	Security Sector Reform
VDP	Volunteers in Defense of the Homeland

Chapter 1: Introduction

The "Broken Chair" monument outside the Palace of Nations in Geneva serves as a stark reminder to politicians and diplomats of their responsibility to protect and assist civilians affected by armed violence. Despite the ongoing devastation inflicted upon civilians by conflicts worldwide, many of these crises receive little to no attention from international media. Instead, conflicts related to the direct security of Western states, such as Gaza and Ukraine, receive the majority of attention (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023). Consequently, the daily suffering endured by communities across Sub-Saharan Africa often goes unnoticed and underrepresented. This underscores the significance of the Broken Chair's message, emphasising the importance of acknowledging and addressing all conflicts and affected populations, regardless of their visibility on the global stage.

The situation in Sub-Saharan Africa is dire, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the United Nations (UN). In Sudan, women are being forced into prostitution to ensure their families' safety and access to food (OHCHR, 2023). Meanwhile, children in Somalia suffer mutilations on a daily basis (UNSC, 2023d, para. 74). In the Central African Republic (CAR), over half the population, roughly 3.4 million people, urgently require humanitarian assistance (HRW, 2024, pp. 132–137). Shockingly, on April 20, 2023, state military forces in Burkina Faso executed at least 156 civilians, with almost a third of them being children, marking one of the deadliest massacres in the country since 2015 (p. 103). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), armed groups are known for massacring civilians in refugee camps and committing femicides, perpetrating violence for its own sake (pp. 177–182). Lastly, in Mali, state security forces, in collaboration with Russia-backed Wagener Group fighters, frequently abuse and kill civilians during counterterrorism operations (pp. 415–421).

Remarkably, both UN-led and African-led peacekeeping operations (PKOs) have been deployed to these countries mandated to halt violence against civilians (Doss, 2014; Lotze, 2014). While these missions have achieved some success, the persistent escalation of violence in the region, the withdrawal of several UN-led missions, and the inability of African-led missions to intervene effectively during ongoing attacks suggest a significant gap between their intended objectives and their actual effectiveness. What is more, since the early 21st century, and even in the late 1990s, there has been a growing call in both academic literature and within the UN itself for a more grassroots approach to peacekeeping and peacebuilding (Donais, 2009; Pietz & von Carlowitz, 2007; UN, 2000). This approach advocates for increased involvement

of ‘the local’ in these endeavours, such as through the support of UN-led PKOs for local ownership initiatives.

Despite the explicit inclusion of ‘the local’ in the official mandates of PKOs, there remains a notable absence of guidelines on how to effectively integrate ‘the local’ and what precisely constitutes a local partner (Campbell, 2020). Additionally, there has been a noticeable shift in ownership of peacekeeping efforts on the African continent, with African-led PKOs replacing UN-led PKOs (Petrini & Pepe, 2024). However, while it is sometimes argued that African-led missions possess better knowledge of the conflict and the local population, they frequently lack the logistical and financial resources the UN possesses to conduct these missions effectively and successfully incorporate ‘the local’ into their efforts (Campbell, 2020; von Billerbeck, 2015).

This thesis centres on the concept of local ownership in PKOs on the African continent, particularly regarding the ongoing transition from UN-led to regionally-led PKOs. The research addresses the following research questions: *“How do specific approaches to local ownership initiatives implemented in UN-led peacekeeping missions, compared to those in regionally-led missions, influence their relative effectiveness in achieving mission objectives?”*. The question aims to contribute to bridging the gap in existing academic literature concerning the current transition from UN-led to regionally-led missions. It does so by scrutinising the operationalisation of local ownership, a concept often overlooked in the academic discussion regarding this transition, in both Mali and the DRC by the UN and African

The societal relevance is evident in the severe crises in Mali, the DRC, and Sub-Saharan Africa, marked by human rights violations, crimes against humanity, and genocide perpetrated by both armed groups and state troops. In Mali, the migrant influx to the European Union (EU) and youth radicalisation by extremists highlight the need for a robust international response. Meanwhile, the Eastern DRC faces an unimaginable humanitarian crisis amid the exploitation of raw materials. The use and exploitation of child soldiers in these countries worsen the suffering and displacement. Thus, finding a sustainable solution to these conflicts is not only important for international security but is morally and ethically important as well.

This thesis explores the research question through a structured approach. It begins by reviewing the academic debate, tracing the evolution of peacekeeping and peacebuilding concepts, and highlighting the importance of local ownership. It then outlines the research design, detailing the hypothesis, variables, methodology, and limitations. The analysis focuses on Mali and the DRC’s PKOs and their inclusion of local ownership projects. The thesis concludes with a synthesis of findings, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Academic Debate

Chapter 2 illustrates the historical trajectory and academic debate on peacekeeping and local ownership. It traces UN peacekeeping's evolution from post-conflict elections to multidimensional PKOs that tackle intra-state conflicts and the emergence of peacekeeping in regional organisations. The chapter then examines local ownership's emergence as a response to conventional intervention limits, explores its complexities, and debates its effectiveness. It also clarifies the research gaps, particularly regarding local ownership's impact and the transition to regional missions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 The changing scope of UN peacekeeping

Understanding the historical context of PKOs is crucial for grasping the integration of local ownership into peacekeeping. The concept of 'peacekeeping' has evolved over time, much like conflict itself, and its interpretation can vary depending on the geographical region under consideration (Duursma et al., 2023). Many peacekeeping functions have been applied over the decades, ranging from discreet ceasefire observation missions to robust and militarised enforcement missions. The more "classic" concept of peacekeeping lies somewhere in the middle and involves the physical interposition of an external third force exerting moral pressure between antagonistic parties (Macqueen, 2002). Though UN peacekeeping operations in the current day are primarily found in Sub-Saharan Africa, this was not always the case. Initially, UN peacekeeping operations were centred around the greater Middle East, as almost half of the missions mandated before the end of the Cold War occurred there.

The first UN PKO started in 1948 and monitored the Israel border ceasefire (Adebajo, 2023). It was not until 1960 that Sub-Saharan Africa saw its first UN peacekeeping missions, notably in the DRC. Surprisingly, the original conception of the UN's security function did not include PKOs. When the UN Charter was formulated in the 1940s, the UN intended to deploy military power as a forceful instrument in a global system of collective security (Macqueen, 2002). This vision, termed "chapter six and a half" by the second UN Secretary-General

(UNSG) Dag Hammarskjöld, revolved around Chapters VI and VII[1] of the UN Charter and was shared by the five permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council (UNSC) (Adebajo, 2023).

The concept of power within conflict resolution has consistently been pivotal in shaping the evolution and efficacy of PKOs [illegible]. During these early stages of PKOs, the ambitious scope outlined in Chapters VI and VII encountered significant hurdles, primarily due to the prevailing geopolitical situation, characterised by the Cold War rivalry between the United States (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The foundational premise of the UN security system rested on the assumption of cooperation and consensus among its P5 (Williams, 2019).

However, as the P5 included both the US and the USSR, this granted them the authority to wield their veto power, enabling them to block any resolution deemed contrary to their interests (Macqueen, 2002). Consequently, PKOs and broader conflict resolution efforts became politicised instruments utilised selectively to safeguard the strategic interests of the US and USSR. The imperative to prevent the other major power from gaining political, economic, or territorial advantages profoundly influenced the decision-making process regarding PKOs (Hegre et al., 2019; Richmond et al., 2024).

As a result of this geopolitical dynamic, early PKOs predominantly gravitated towards conflicts considered geopolitically neutral, such as those in Angola and Mozambique. These conflicts offered an appearance of impartiality, providing a platform where PKOs could be deployed without significantly favouring one major power over the other. It is, therefore, not surprising that the early 1990s marked a significant shift in UN-led PKOs. With the end of the Cold War and the elimination of the USSR as a viable global superpower, the US arguably became the most important actor in conflict resolution as the global order moved from bipolarity to unipolarity (de Coning & Peter, 2019). This stage of peacekeeping witnessed a surge in mission deployments primarily focused on intrastate conflicts and represented a "learning phase" for the UN as it struggled with the challenges of peacekeeping in internal conflicts (von Billerbeck, 2016, p. 35).

Most scholars attribute this learning phase to the major failures of UN peacekeeping in the early 1990s (Adebajo, 2023; de Coning & Peter, 2019; Duursma et al., 2023; Hegre et al.,

[1] Chapter VI outlines the procedures for the peaceful resolution of conflicts between Member States. Chapter VII outlines the powers of the UNSC regarding the maintenance or restoration of international security where it is threatened.

2019; Macqueen, 2002; Pinto, 2024). Despite significant shifts in the global order and the nature of warfare, conflict resolution methods did not change accordingly (Richmond et al., 2024). The 'old' model of UN peacekeeping was applied without significant adaptation, assuming its effectiveness regardless of the context. Numerous PKO failures, like the inability of the UN to prevent and stop genocide in both Rwanda and Srebrenica and the US-led 'Bloody Monday raid' in Somalia in 1993, exposed these severe limitations of UN peacekeeping and seriously tainted the image of the UN as an effective actor in international security (Ahmad, 1998; Williams, 2014). Furthermore, the extensive media coverage of these failures tended to overshadow the comparatively successful UN PKOs on the African continent, such as those in Mozambique and Namibia (Koops et al., 2015b).

Koops et al. (2015b, p. 266) identify three similar factors contributing to the failures of UN PKOs in the 1990s. Firstly, these missions faced persistent violence and, in extreme cases, genocide, with conflicting parties exhibiting little cooperation or interest in peaceful resolution. This challenged the UN's preparedness for such hostile environments and illustrated how UN PKOs could be mandated prematurely. Secondly, the establishment of new PKOs saw improvisation and insufficient assessment, expanding the UN's mandate without requisite infrastructure or expertise. This led to bureaucratic inefficiencies and logistical hurdles, compounded by confusion between consent-based and coercive actions, undermining the effectiveness of these operations. Lastly, wavering commitment among Member States hindered effective UN PKOs, which is evident in reluctance at both the UNSC and operational levels to intervene in conflicts regarded as "wars of others," like Rwanda and Srebrenica (Koops et al., 2015b, p. 266).

These three factors are further strengthened when looking at the typology of UN PKOs in Africa at the time. Macqueen (2002, pp. 28-32) categorises UN interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s into four types. Firstly, PKOs that addressed state disintegration or the threat thereof, like Somalia. Secondly, PKOs that "accompany[ied], monitore[d], and legitimise[d]" (p. 29) regional force interventions, as in Liberia and the CAR. Thirdly, PKOs that implemented internally agreed upon peace agreements, seen in Angola and Mozambique. Lastly, missions that resembled 'classic' peacekeeping, as in Namibia and Northern Chad.

While structured, some PKOs, like Sierra Leone and the CAR, could fit multiple categories. Some scholars argue that this division of UN PKOs reveals the superficial nature of early post-Cold War UN peacekeeping. It failed to address root causes often tied to the UN's and European states' neglect during the wave of independence and decolonisation processes in

Sub-Saharan African states (Adebajo, 2011, 2023; Doyle & Sambanis, 2005; Macqueen, 2002; Williams, 2013).

Thus, despite then UNSG Boutros-Ghali's assertion in his 'An Agenda for Peace' document in June 1992 that the UN had become a central instrument for conflict prevention and resolution in the post-Cold War era, by early 1996, the organisation had suffered significant blows to its credibility as a conflict management actor (de Coning, 2023; de Coning & Peter, 2019; Hegre et al., 2019; Koops et al., 2015b). Consequently, the UN adopted a more cautious approach between 1996 and 1998, providing less ambitious mandates to approved missions and taking somewhat of a backseat.

This retreat from comprehensive peacekeeping also prompted positive changes, culminating in the reaffirmation of the UN's commitment to peacekeeping through a new approach known as multidimensional operations by 1999 (Koops et al., 2015b). Notably, during this period, the UN encountered other challenges due to the previously mentioned emergence of regional organisations such as the North Altantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which began to assert themselves as peacekeeping actors, challenging the UN's longstanding monopoly on such operations (Baba & Slotter, 2014; Macqueen, 2002).

2.1.2 Local ownership in 21st century UN peacekeeping

The evolution of UN peacekeeping in Sub-Saharan Africa is closely linked to decolonisation (Koops et al., 2015a; Macqueen, 2002; Williams, 2013). While early UN PKOs primarily supported newly independent states in nation and state-building, the 21st-century landscape of UN peacekeeping has been shaped by addressing conflicts that partly stem from past failures (Williams, 2013). Additionally, significant shifts occurred in peacekeeping practices during this period, influenced notably by two major events: the "war on terror" by the US-led Western nations, including subsequent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the global financial crisis of 2008. These events altered UN PKOs, with Western Member States facing constraints on their financial contributions while a surge in deployed personnel occurred amongst African states (Koops et al., 2015a).

In the 21st century, several documents were published to 'professionalise' UN peacekeeping and enhance the three core principles: consent, impartiality, and minimal use of force (Koops et al., 2015a). One such document, issued in early 2008 by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN-DPO) titled 'United Nations Peacekeeping Operations:

Guidelines and Principles,' not only clarified these core principles but also introduced three additional factors deemed critical for operations' success, notably emphasising the importance of 'the local' in peacekeeping.

These factors included ensuring that UN PKOs are viewed as legitimate by key local and international stakeholders, establishing credibility, and, crucially, promoting national and local ownership of the peace process (UN-DPO, 2008, pp. 36–40). While this document was pivotal in integrating local ownership into UN peacekeeping, it was not the first instance of such emphasis. As early as 2001, then UNSG Kofi Annan endorsed the concept in PKOs, asserting that "[sustainable peace] can only be achieved by the local population itself; the role of the United Nations is merely to facilitate the process that seeks to dismantle the structures of violence and create the conditions conducive to durable peace and sustainable development" (UNSC, 2001).

Annan reaffirmed this endorsement in 2004 when he noted that "peace operations must better assist national stakeholders" by having the UN learn "how to respect and support local ownership, local leadership and a local constituency for reform […]" (UNSC, 2004, para. 17). Thus, local ownership emerged as a crucial aspect of the evolution of UN PKOs in the 21st century. Scholars widely acknowledge that this emphasis on local ownership arose in response to concerns about the legitimacy of UN PKOs, which, as previously said, were expanding their mandates and encroaching on tasks traditionally managed by sovereign governments, thereby sometimes infringing upon the self-determination of host states (de Coning, 2023; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015; Namakula, 2022; Randazzo, 2021; von Billerbeck, 2016).

While the concept of local ownership was relatively new to peacekeeping in the early 2000s, ideas of local participation and empowerment have been prevalent in development discourse since the 1970s and 80s (Namakula, 2022; von Billerbeck, 2015). Furthermore, following his 1992 'An Agenda for Peace,' UNSG Boutros-Ghali introduced 'An Agenda for Development' in 1994, emphasising the interconnectedness of peace and development and stating that "development is the most secure basis for peace" (UNSC, 1994, para. 3).

Despite the UN's aspirations to integrate local ownership into its peacebuilding efforts, scholars argue there is a disconnect between formulation and operationalisation, with ownership often being implemented restrictively (Campbell, 2020; Lemay-Hébert & Kappler, 2016; Namakula, 2022; Randazzo, 2021; Richmond, 2012; Richmond et al., 2024; von Billerbeck, 2016). This disconnect is evident in recent criticisms of UN peacekeeping missions in Mali and the DRC, where they were accused of intrusion of the state's self-determination

and exacerbating conflict by failing to adequately engage with the local population's concerns (Al Jazeera, 2024; Giray, 2023; Jorgensen, 2023; Sow et al., 2023).

Significant evidence of this disconnect is also found in reports issued by the UN itself. The 'Uniting Our Strengths for Peace' report by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) (2015) is one of the most notable (van der Lijn et al., 2017). In addition to assessing other challenges faced by PKOs, such as asymmetric threats and increased instances of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers, the report further underscores the importance of local engagement on numerous occasions (HIPPO, 2015, paras. 39.3, 60, 85, 87, 92, 96, 130, 137, 148, 233–238).

Fourteen years after Annan's letter on local ownership, the report emphasises that "by shifting from merely consulting with local people to actively including them in their work, missions are able to monitor and respond to how local people experience the impact of peace operations" (xii HIPPO, 2015). According to some scholars, this report highlights how local ownership had been operationalised superficially rather than beneficially to mission effectiveness in mitigating and resolving conflict as in those fourteen years, local ownership was still an elusive concept within the UN (Aulin & Divin, 2017; Campbell, 2020; von Billerbeck, 2016).

The operationalisation of local ownership in UN PKOs lacks a standardised approach, and efforts to promote local ownership often exhibit inconsistency, with various staff members adopting different methods (Boutellis et al., 2020; Pietz & von Carlowitz, 2007; von Billerbeck, 2015, 2016). These efforts include public information campaigns, consultations, meetings, and training aimed at engaging local actors. Despite these initiatives, scholars observe a significant absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation to assess their effectiveness in fostering genuine ownership among local stakeholders (Donais, 2015; Nilsson, 2015; von Billerbeck, 2016).

The diversity in approaches across UN sections and missions exacerbates the disjointed implementations of local ownership (Pietz & von Carlowitz, 2007; von Billerbeck, 2016). Fieldwork by von Billerbeck (2016, pp. 79-84) indicates that many local actors perceive a lack of genuine ownership, as their influence over decision-making remains limited. The paper further observed that this could have added to the relatively negative image of UN PKOs among local people over the years.

UN PKOs also frequently integrate local engagement strategies into the Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programs. These initiatives aim to disarm combatants, facilitate demobilisation from armed groups, and facilitate their reintegration into

civilian life. DDR programs are part of broader Security Sector Reform (SSR) efforts, which also encompass reforms in areas such as the judicial system and law enforcement (Edmonds et al., 2009). In Sub-Saharan Africa, conflicts primarily involve multiple armed groups with diverse and changing interests in the conflict and internal differences, highlighting the importance of their inclusion in peacebuilding processes (Druckman et al., 2024; Ghais, 2022). However, scholars note that this inclusion has not consistently occurred, resulting in failed DDR programs and unsuccessful attempts at local engagement (Edmonds et al., 2009; Ghais, 2022).

An increasing number of UN missions in Sub-Saharan Africa are either set to leave or have recently completed their withdrawal from their respective countries. Most notably, the UN recently finalised the withdrawal of MINUSMA, its PKO in Mali, and by the end of 2024, MONUSCO, the UN PKO in the DRC, is scheduled to leave as well (Al Jazeera, 2024; Jorgensen, 2023; Sow et al., 2023). Despite the withdrawal of UN PKOs, the organisation's presence in the region remains significant. This is evidenced by its continued support of several missions led by regional institutions such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) through direct advisory and military support or indirectly by partially funding the missions (UN, 2023; UNSC, 2023).

Since 2014, when MINUSCA, the PKO in the CAR, was approved, no new UN PKO has been established (de Coning, 2023). This trend underscores the increasing reliance on regional organisations to undertake peacekeeping and peacebuilding initiatives, a shift advocated since the early 21st century. However, according to scholars, this transition poses several challenges, including concerns about regional bodies' capacity and vested interests (Aall & Crocker, 2016; Donais, 2009, 2021; Williams & Dersso, 2015; Williams & Haacke, 2011). Moreover, there remains uncertainty regarding whether regionally-led missions prioritise local ownership and, if so, how their approach differs from UN-led missions. This also raises questions about the efficacy of regional initiatives in resolving the longstanding and delicate conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ayangafac & Cilliers, 2011; Macqueen, 2002; Williams, 2017).

Some scholars posit that this decline in UN-led peacekeeping operations across Sub-Saharan Africa does not signify the end of peacebuilding endeavours in the region (Adebajo, 2023; Allen & Mazurova, 2024; Chen, 2024; Diehl et al., 2023c; Williams & Boutellis, 2014). Resolution 2719 of the UNSC emerges as a crucial milestone for the future of PKOs in Sub-Saharan Africa. Recent literature underscores its significance, as this resolution established a

framework enabling AU-led PKOs to access UN funding through assessed contributions (Allen & Mazurova, 2024; UNSC, 2023b, paras. 3–10).

Advocates argue that this framework holds the potential to strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of PKOs in Sub-Saharan Africa while bolstering African leadership in their management. Furthermore, it could introduce a new era of peacekeeping, characterised by a shift wherein the UN assumes a supportive rather than initiating role, missions transcend the military-centric paradigm prevalent in recent African PKOs, and where future PKOs are comparatively modest in scale and duration (Allen & Mazurova, 2024; Chen, 2024).

Nevertheless, a primary challenge associated with the resolution is securing consent from host governments and, notably, garnering support from the local population. It is posited that when a PKO loses popular support, its ability to fulfil its mandate diminishes (Allen & Mazurova, 2024). Consequently, this resurfaces the question of how local ownership is currently utilised, as it potentially leads missions to lose rather than gain popular support. It underscores the imperative of this research in light of this recent resolution.

2.1.3 The challenges of local ownership in peacekeeping

In addition to the disconnect between the operationalisation of local ownership in UN PKOs and its formulation in key UN documents, other challenges confront local ownership initiatives. Since local ownership is not exclusively tied to the UN, regional and sub-regional organisations have the autonomy to launch their own local ownership initiatives in peacebuilding operations, though the UN sometimes aids these, which at times leads to overlapping projects (Ayangafac & Cilliers, 2011; Petrini & Pepe, 2024).

The perception of ownership as a “solution” to PKOs’ challenges underscores the recognition of legitimacy, sustainability, and ownership itself as technical matters (von Billerbeck, 2016, p. 37). The UN considers the lack of local legitimacy and sustainability as operational hurdles that can be addressed through technical adjustments to peacekeeping methods rather than a broader re-evaluation of international intervention approaches (Mac Ginty, 2015; Williams & Dersso, 2015). In this context, ownership is seen as providing precisely such a technical solution: it involves actions aimed at establishing or fostering ownership and mitigating the negative impacts on local legitimacy and sustainability caused by increased infringements on self-determination and heightened international involvement in post-conflict states (Campbell, 2020; Lemay-Hébert & Kappler, 2016; von Billerbeck, 2015, 2016).

Local ownership is sometimes also perceived as more effective in regional conflict management strategies. Though scholars argue that regional states and organisations have a better understanding of the conflict dynamics and players and are deeply invested in the outcomes, particularly when conflicts spill across borders like in Mali, they also highlight the challenges of operationalising local ownership in regionally-led missions. These challenges revolve around the capacity of regional organisations, the alignment of interests among Member States, and the sustainability of the mission. These elements are crucial for ensuring effective local ownership in a PKO (Ayangafac & Cilliers, 2011; Sow et al., 2023; von Billerbeck, 2015; Williams, 2017).

Therefore, the lack of a clear definition of local ownership contributes to the disconnect between its formulation and operationalisation. Despite numerous UN documents discussing and emphasising the concept, none offer a specific framework for understanding *and* implementing local ownership (Campbell, 2020; Chesterman, 2007; Hellmüller, 2012; von Billerbeck, 2015). This ambiguity significantly shapes the discourse on local ownership. Scholars' interpretation of the concept influences academic discussions and their core arguments as well.

Key to this debate is the question of how much control external actors, like the UN, should have over post-conflict state-building and nation-building processes and the level of involvement local actors should have. These actors may operate at different governance levels, from national to sub-national to local (Campbell, 2020; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015; Mac Ginty, 2015; Randazzo, 2021). While some academic literature establishes a definition and then analyses local ownership, others focus on the ongoing debate over its ambiguity. Ultimately, scholars often conclude that the definition can be somewhat context-dependent and varies based on the capabilities of the country where it is implemented, which in turn problematises a framework for local ownership because of this argued context-dependent nature (Ayangafac & Cilliers, 2011; Pietz & von Carlowitz, 2007; Richmond, 2012; Williams & Haacke, 2011).

The ambiguity of the term 'local ownership' extends to several other limitations, including the debate over who actually 'owns' local ownership and peacebuilding (Donais, 2009, 2021; von Billerbeck, 2015). The involvement of various potential internal stakeholders complicates this debate (Donais, 2015; Druckman et al., 2024; Ghais, 2022; von Billerbeck, 2015, 2016). These stakeholders include central and local government bodies, security forces, traditional leaders, civil society organisations (CSOs), businesses, and the local population. Additionally, armed non-state actors such as militias and rebel groups often maintain a presence in post-conflict situations, asserting their ownership rights over peacekeeping efforts and

further destabilising fragile post-conflict societies (Druckman et al., 2024; Ghais, 2022; Namakula, 2022; Victor, 2010).

Furthermore, certain groups, like the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the Eastern DRC, use violence for its own sake, posing a unique challenge to peacebuilding efforts (Bitenga Alexandre et al., 2021). National governments typically serve as the primary partners for the international community in PKOs, with many UN PKOs, as well as those led by regional and sub-regional organisations, relying on agreements with host-country governments to define the operation's scope and authority (von Billerbeck, 2015). Some scholars argue that national governments' consent is essential for local ownership initiatives to extend beyond the national level of governance (Campbell, 2020; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). This underscores one of the core peacekeeping principles that the UN and regional organisations must adhere to: respect for state sovereignty and the requirement of national government consent for peacekeeping efforts (Passmore et al., 2022).

The absence of a functioning government or a polarising transitional administration further complicates the debate over who 'owns' local ownership in post-conflict settings (Campbell, 2020). In the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, intrastate warfare has heightened the need to involve additional actors and promote broader societal engagement in efforts to establish lasting peace (de Coning, 2023; Ghais, 2022). Some scholars have been advocating for a shift from the traditional top-down approach to peacekeeping toward a bottom-up one or even a hybrid version. This shift involves prioritising engagement with CSOs and non-governmental entities. These groups offer valuable insights into public interests and promote accountability, thereby enhancing legitimacy and sustainability (Ghais, 2022; Mac Ginty, 2015; Piiparinen, 2016).

At the same time, the importance of more powerful stakeholder cannot be underestimated, as their support could ensure the PKOs have the necessary capacities for effective implementation (Mac Ginty, 2010). Inclusivity would ensure that the UN and regional bodies remain impartial and responsive to diverse perspectives, essential for navigating post-conflict power struggles and fostering cooperation among all stakeholders (von Billerbeck, 2016). However, scholars also argue that challenges will persist, including illegal trafficking by both state and non-state actors, asymmetry of interests among Member States in regional and sub-regional organisations, as well as the recurring challenge of the complex and ever-changing dynamics of intrastate conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa (Donais, 2009; Hellmüller, 2012; Lemay-Hébert & Kappler, 2016; Pietz & von Carlowitz, 2007; Randazzo, 2021; Richmond, 2012).

2.2 Research gap

While extensive research exists on local ownership within UN PKOs, significant gaps exist, particularly in understanding its dynamics within regional and hybrid missions. Specifically, there is a lack of clarity on how local ownership is operationalised in these contexts and whether its utilisation in regionally-led or hybrid missions indeed enhances peacekeeping effectiveness. Clarifying this operationalisation is crucial as it directly impacts policy development and human lives, potentially leading to more effective and sustainable peacekeeping strategies. By addressing these gaps, the research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of local ownership, informing policymakers and practitioners about best practices for engaging local actors. This, in turn, can enhance the legitimacy and success of PKOs. Additionally, filling this gap provides a foundation for future research, enabling scholars to build upon a more comprehensive framework of local ownership's role in diverse peacekeeping contexts rather than one or the other.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Chapter 3 serves as a vital connection between the academic underpinning in Chapter 2 and the empirical exploration of local ownership in peacebuilding efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa in Chapters 4 and 5. This chapter strives to strengthen the transparency and precision of the research process by highlighting the methodology. It articulates the rationale behind case selection, details the methods employed for data collection and analysis, and establishes the validity of the research approach. Furthermore, it formulates and operationalises the core variables by illustrating their relationships through a causal mechanism. Lastly, it acknowledges and addresses potential limitations inherent in the research design and provides strategies for their mitigation. By methodically defining the research design, this chapter lays the groundwork for a comprehensive and rigorous examination of peacebuilding dynamics in subsequent chapters by ensuring clarity and coherence in the analytical design.

3.1 Expectations and operationalisation

3.1.1 Hypothesis and causal mechanism

The academic debate in Chapter 2 highlights a noticeable need for more scholarly attention to the ongoing transition from UN-led to regionally-led PKOs. The prevailing pessimism in the scholarly discourse regarding the operationalisation of local ownership in UN-led missions contributes to a similarly pessimistic hypothesis. This stems from the fact that most regionally-led missions in Sub-Saharan Africa still receive assistance from the UN to some extent, implying that the UN retains influence over the structure of some missions, albeit to a lesser extent than if it had complete ownership. Consequently, this leads to the formulation of the following hypothesis to be explored in this thesis: *In peacekeeping missions, regardless of whether they are led by the UN, (sub-)regional organisations, or operate in a hybrid framework, local ownership initiatives* ***do not*** *improve missions' effectiveness due to challenges in their operationalisation within the current peacekeeping context.*

In this hypothesis, the unit of analysis comprises PKOs across various degrees of ownership. The contextual framework encompasses the operationalisation of local ownership initiatives within PKOs. The hypothesis posits that irrespective of leadership structure, local ownership initiatives fail to enhance the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions. This failure

is attributed to the specific mechanisms through which local ownership is implemented within the peacekeeping framework. The causal mechanism shown in *Figure 1* illustrates that this research aims to explore a cause of effect rather than an effect of a cause. The significance of this difference pertains to the fact that this research utilises qualitative rather than quantitative methods of analysis, which will be further explained in section 2.3.

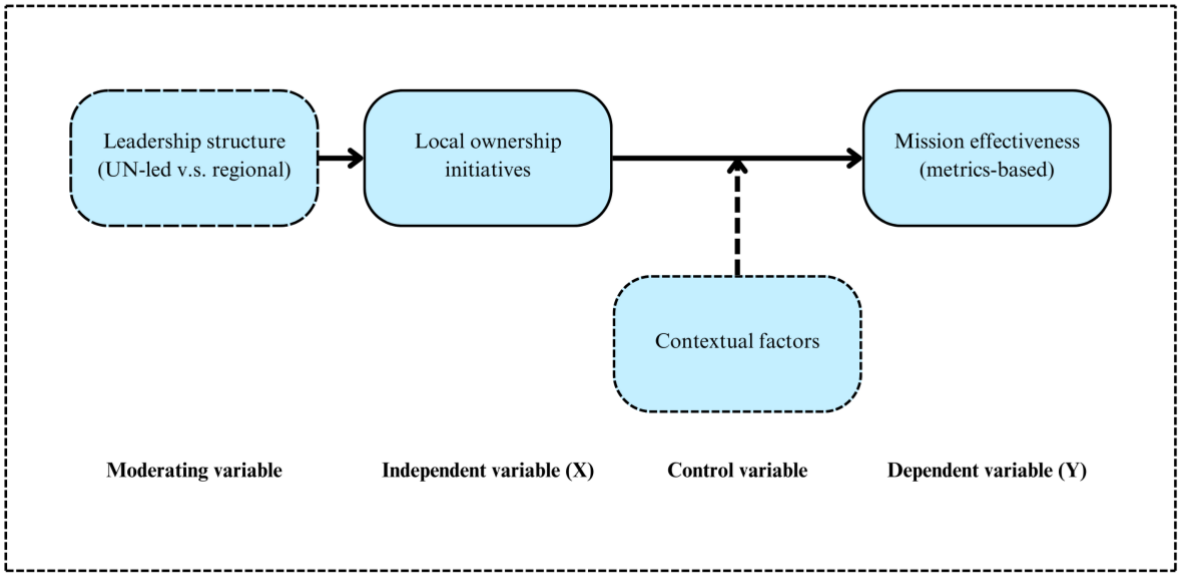

Figure 1: Causal mechanism of the research, indicating the various variables and their respective relations.

3.1.2 Variables and operationalisation

While local ownership initiatives are the primary factor hypothesised to influence PKOs' effectiveness, the research framework acknowledges the potential influence of other variables. One such variable is leadership structure, categorised as either UN-led or regionally-led. This thesis posits this as a moderating variable, meaning the type of leadership might condition the relationship between local ownership and effectiveness. Since the leading body typically mandates and structures peacekeeping missions, their leadership style (UN-led vs. regional) directly influences the formulation of local ownership initiatives, justifying its placement in *Figure 1*. The operationalisation of this moderating variable involves a straightforward classification of missions based on the leading body, making it a categorical variable. The dotted line surrounding the framework acknowledges there might be other, unknown factors beyond those shown here that affect mission effectiveness, like certain relations between armed groups.

Contextual factors, such as the level of conflict intensity or local political dynamics, are considered control variables. These represent external factors that may also influence mission effectiveness, but they are not the central focus of this research. The analysis accounts for their influence by incorporating these external factors at the beginning of both analytical chapters. The operationalisation is informed by two key considerations: the timeframe of the analysed PKOs and the characteristics of the respective conflict zones. Though the research focuses on the other three variables, incorporating the factors as control variables strengthens the research design by minimising the influence of extraneous factors and ensuring the robustness of the findings on the impact of local ownership initiatives.

The **independent variable** (X) is the approach to local ownership initiatives within peacekeeping missions. Deriving from Chapter 2, local ownership refers to the extent to which local actors (national and sub-national governments, community leaders, and the local population) are empowered to participate in and influence the decision-making processes of the mission, focussing on the local population and community-leaders as their incorporation is most overshadowed in PKOs. This variable is categorical, as it is classified into distinct categories representing different levels of implementation (e.g. high, medium, low). Categorising it this way allows for a clear comparison of how varying degrees of local ownership impact mission effectiveness. The variable is considered independent because this thesis is primarily interested in understanding the causal effect of local ownership on mission outcomes.

The operationalisation of this variable involves several steps. First, the extent to which the PKO mandate emphasises incorporating locals is assessed by examining the *quantity* and *quality* of local inclusion and ownership. Superficial mentions of 'the local' without guiding principles are insufficient here. For UN PKOs, the analysis mainly focuses on local ownership projects funded by the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), as these are directly controlled by the UNSG and UNSC, aligning with UN mandates' ownership. Moreover, due to the numerous funding sources and projects, a selective approach is necessary to maintain research integrity. Finally, the PKO must support the local ownership initiative to accurately gauge its role and impact on fulfilling the PKO's mandate.

The **dependent variable** (Y) is mission effectiveness. Measuring the "effectiveness" of a PKO is ambiguous, as there are several ways to determine it. This thesis employs the framework for analysing PKOs established by Diehl et al. in their recent book, "*When Peacekeeping Missions Collide: Balancing Multiple Roles in Peace Operations*." Their renowned expertise in conflict resolution, coupled with the timeliness and rigour of their

research, validate the framework's relevance in this context. The book highlights the exponential growth and diversity of peacekeeping operations since the Cold War's end, aligning with the literature review in Chapter 2. Central to their work is how individual PKOs influence outcomes in other missions within the same operations. Their model, depicted in *Figure 2*, provides a structured approach to analyse the effectiveness of today's complex PKOs (Diehl et al., 2023b, p. 234).

The model comprises three distinct periods –antecedents, concomitants, and consequences – each featuring two boxes. These periods delineate key stages leading up to, during, and following the operationalisation of the PKO. In turn, each box signifies a critical element within these periods that influences the formulation, implementation, or evaluation of the PKO. Like the causal mechanism depicted in *Figure 1*, the authors acknowledge external factors that may cause a peacekeeping mission to deviate from its trajectory, thus signifying the model as a holistic representation of a typical peace operation (Diehl et al., 2023b, pp. 234–235).

Though they are interconnected, three boxes in particular are the focus of the operationalisation of PKO effectiveness: "Process dynamics," "Outcomes," and, to a lesser extent, "Post-PKO Developments." Like the dependent variable, these boxes encapsulate pivotal moments concerning local ownership initiatives and engagement in a PKO. Two other boxes, "Context" and "Conditions," are also considered in the contextual analysis conducted at the beginning of Chapters 4 and 5 to illustrate the events leading up to the establishment of PKOs, as discussed in section 3.1.2.

Concretely, the operationalisation of the dependent variable and its interaction with the independent variable is outlined as follows. Each of the three main boxes serves as the foundation for analysing both UN-led and African-led peacekeeping operations. Within each box, there is an emphasis on the level of local ownership integration, operationalised as the independent variable, categorised as high, medium, or low. Subsequently, the analysis evaluates the effectiveness of each level in achieving the goals outlined in each of the three main boxes in *Figure 2*. In other words, the operationalisation and formulation of local ownership in each mission are compared to then gauge if they added to the outlined goals of the respective mandate.

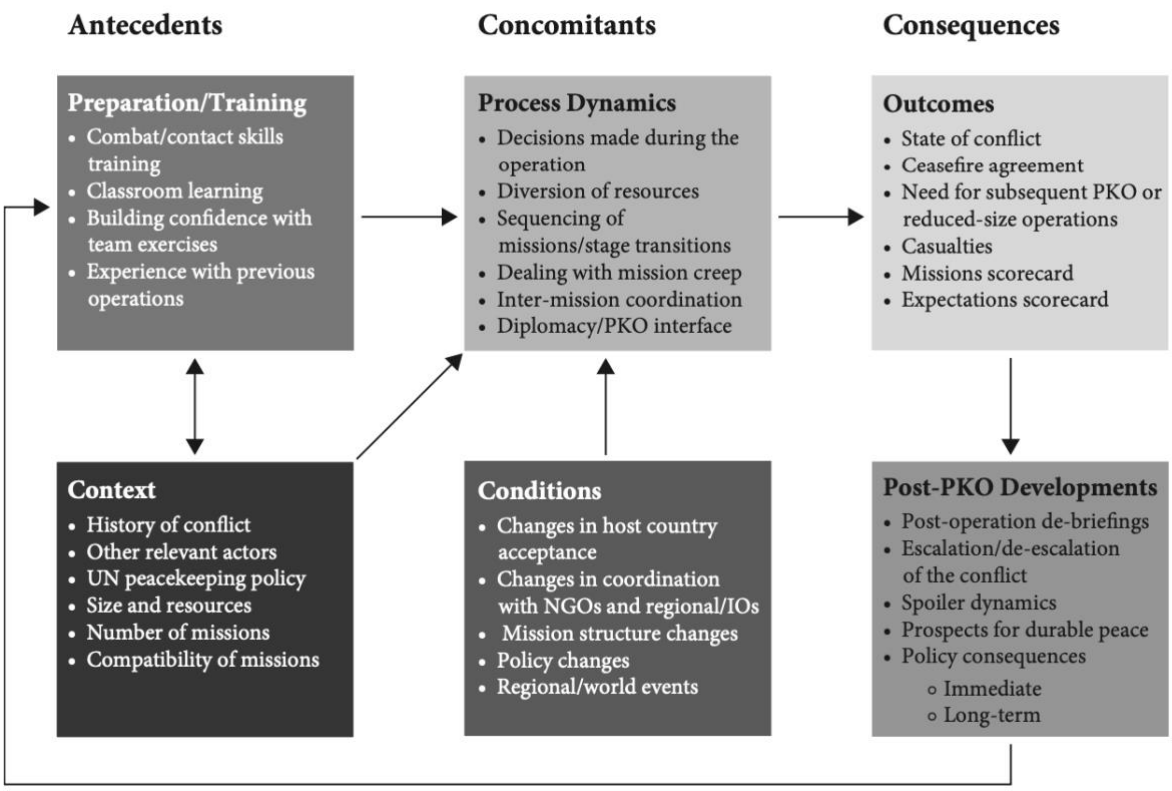

Figure 2: The peace operations analysis model by Diehl et al. (2023).

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Method of case selection

This section outlines the method of case selection, resulting in Mali and the DRC being chosen. Four critical criteria inform the case selection. The criteria are firmly rooted in the literature review established in Chapter 2 and the academic and societal relevance in Chapter 1, which both emphasise the intricate relationship between local ownership initiatives, peacebuilding efforts, and the broader security landscape. Chapter 1 partially justifies why Mali and the DRC meet these criteria and are viable case studies. Chapters 4 and 5 provide further evidence. The selection criteria are as follows:

1. **Experiencing intrastate conflict dynamics**: The strategy prioritises cases experiencing ongoing internal armed conflicts. This is because, as highlighted in Chapter 2, this is one of the main characteristics of conflicts in the 21st century.
2. **Hosting diverse PKOs**: The selected countries must have hosted or continue to host both UN-led and African-led PKOs during the conflict mentioned in the first criterium.

This is because the research focuses on the difference between these two types of ownership over PKOs.

3. **Regional instability amplification**: The current internal situation must significantly contribute to a broader destabilisation of the respective region. This is because it highlights the importance of the African-led mission to succeed in de-escalating the conflict, as an escalation could result in inter-state conflicts.
4. **Global security concerns**: Unresolved conflict can potentially escalate, threatening international security. Therefore, the conflict should threaten the respective region and international security.

3.2.2 Method of data collection

This section outlines the method used for data collection, which is crucial for understanding limitations (as discussed in section 3.4), facilitating replication, ensuring ethical standards, enhancing validity (as elaborated in section 3.2.4), and informing the method of data analysis (as explained in section 3.2.3). The thesis employs a data triangulation method, which entails gathering data from multiple sources to identify possible patterns and inconsistencies (Flick, 2004). In this regard, the research focuses on the three data sources.

Firstly, insights from various engagements with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and other officials are used. During the author's internship at the MFA in early 2022, informal conversations with policy officers yielded valuable insights into Dutch government perspectives and strategies concerning Mali and the DRC. Furthermore, discussions with civil servants at the Dutch embassies in Bamako (Mali) and Kinshasa (DRC) provided a deeper understanding of the political landscape in both countries and the intricate interplay of regional dynamics.

As part of the author's involvement in drafting a policy recommendation report for the MFA within the West Wing youth think tank, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. These insights are featured in Chapter 5 of this thesis. The West Wing engaged with various stakeholders, including PhD students, Dutch policy officers, experts on the Great Lakes region (GLR), and workers of the Dialogue Advisory Group. All individuals consented to use their information in the West Wing's working report. The engagements offer nuanced perspectives and contextual understanding for analysing conflict dynamics and peacebuilding efforts in Mali and the DRC.

Secondly, this thesis utilises various academic literature. Academic literature constitutes a significant component of the triangulation method, encompassing peer-reviewed articles and books that facilitate an extensive review of scholarly discourse. It provides empirical studies relevant to understanding the historical, political, social, and economic contexts of Mali and the DRC, including their respective peace missions. Academic literature offers a comprehensive and scholarly perspective on the root causes, dynamics, and impacts of intrastate conflicts and peacekeeping missions in Mali and the DRC. Drawing upon academic literature enhances the rigour and credibility of the study by grounding the analysis in established theories, concepts, and scholarly debates. The selection of academic literature is guided by the inclusion of one or multiple of the following key terms: "local," "ownership," "conflict resolution," "peacekeeping," "peace," "MINUSMA," "MONUSCO," "Great Lakes," "Sahel," "Mali," "DRC," "Congo," "Sub-Saharan Africa," "AU," "ECOWAS," "EAC," and "SADC."

The final data source employed for triangulation encompasses documents authored by regional and international organisations relating to PKOs. These bodies include the UNSC, the UN-DPO, the UN Peacebuilding Commission, the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the AU, the AU Peace and Security Council (AU-PSC), Regional Economic Communities (RECs) (e.g., the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), ECOWAS, and the Economic Community for Central African States (ECCAS)), and intergovernmental organisations (e.g. the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Group of 5 in the Sahel).

Document types include press releases, resolutions, letters to the UNSG or President of the UNSC, special reports, reports by the UNSG, *communiqués* issued by the African organisations, and other informatory expressions. These documents are integral to understanding the intricacies of PKOs in Mali and the DRC. They provide official mandates, resolutions, and updates on peacekeeping efforts, which allows for insights into the decision-making processes, strategies, and challenges regarding the implementation of local ownership.

3.2.3 Method of data analysis

Following the data collection method, this section outlines how the data is analysed. The thesis utilises a Focus Structured Comparison (FSC) for this. FSC is a methodological approach often used in conflict analysis that involves systematically comparing cases based on predetermined criteria (George, 2018). It allows for a focus on specific aspects of interest, like the dependent

and independent variables, while controlling for other variables, such as the previously described moderating and control variables.

By focussing on some fundamental elements, as outlined in the latter part of this section, the thesis gains a nuanced understanding of local ownership's effect on PKOs in different contexts. Unlike single-case studies, which usually tend to favour a process-tracing method and may lack comparative depth, FSC allows for the examination of multiple cases, providing a broader perspective on peacekeeping dynamics and local ownership initiatives. Moreover, compared to, for example, large-N quantitative studies, FSC offers detailed qualitative analysis, capturing the complexities and nuances of who 'owns' local ownership in peacekeeping.

To operationalise an FSC, this thesis establishes a comparative framework that allows for a systematic analysis and comparison of the various PKOs in Mali and the DRC. While the research primarily compares UN-led and African-led PKOs' integration of local ownership, this framework does allow for a comparison between Mali and the DRC as well in Chapter 6. The following elements are part of this comparative framework:

1. **Missions' mandates and objectives**: A comparison of the mandates and goals of different PKOs in Mali and the DRC, examining the extent to which they prioritise local ownership, as outlined in the operationalisation of the independent variable in section 3.1. This is done to assess whether mandates emphasise the involvement of local actors in decision-making processes, conflict resolution mechanisms, and peacebuilding efforts.
2. **Stakeholder engagement**: The extent to which what is said in the mandate regarding local ownership is actually operationalised in various peacebuilding projects. Thus, the analysis examines the engagement with local stakeholders, including government authorities, CSOs, community leaders, and grassroots organisations. This is done to evaluate the effectiveness of these mechanisms for consulting and collaborating with local actors in mission planning, implementation, and evaluation.
3. **Capacity building**: Assessing the initiatives aimed at building the capacity of local institutions, including security forces, justice systems, and governance structures. This is done to compare the provision of training, technical assistance, and resources to empower local actors to assume peace and security responsibility.
4. **Conflict sensitivity and context analysis**: Examine the extent to which PKOs demonstrate sensitivity to local dynamics, culture, and socio-political contexts. This is

done to evaluate the integration of local knowledge and perspectives into conflict analysis, early warning systems, and conflict resolution strategies.

3.3 Validity

Internal validity is maintained through clear operational definitions for variables, ensuring consistency and minimising ambiguity. The control variables are employed to mitigate confounding factors, allowing for a precise evaluation of the impact of local ownership initiatives on mission effectiveness. By adopting a systematic comparative approach, patterns across diverse contexts can be identified, which enhances internal validity. Moreover, *external validity* is strengthened by strategically selecting cases from Sub-Saharan Africa, which exhibits diverse but also some similar conflict dynamics and PKOs. This facilitates a broader applicability of findings beyond the specific research context. The triangulation of data from various sources, including academic literature, stakeholder interviews, and official documents, enhances the comprehensiveness and robustness of the research, thereby improving external validity. Lastly, *content validity* is ensured by grounding the variables' conceptualisation in existing theoretical frameworks and empirical literature. Consultation with experts during data collection validates the relevance and appropriateness of operational definitions and measurement techniques, aligning them with established conceptual understandings. This meticulous approach contributes to the accuracy and credibility of the research findings.

3.4 Limitations

Acknowledging and mitigating limitations plays a vital role in upholding the research's integrity and validity. These limitations encompass factors or constraints that may affect findings' reliability, generalisability, or interpretability. By openly discussing limitations, transparency and intellectual sincerity are maintained, aiding readers in understanding the study's scope. Additionally, addressing limitations mitigates potential biases or confounding factors, enhancing the credibility of the research. This thesis considers the following limitations and biases.

Firstly, the data collection method faces a linguistic limitation primarily due to the author's lack of proficiency in languages other than Dutch and English. Sources in different languages, mainly French, are less accessible, thus constraining the available pool of sources for the research. Since French is one of the primary languages spoken in Mali and the DRC, this limitation significantly impacts data procurement. However, most academic literature utilised in the previously described data triangulation is either initially written in English or translated into it. Additionally, documents from international and regional organisations are typically available in multiple languages, including English. The only potential source this linguistic barrier affects is interviews with experts, as many local individuals communicate in French. Nonetheless, this limitation is addressed by ensuring that translations are done by accredited translators where possible.

Secondly, the methodology is further limited by the absence of interviews or fieldwork conducted specifically for this research, narrowing its analytical scope. Various factors influenced this decision. Safety concerns in Mali and the DRC hindered independent travel, while time and personal financial constraints prevented guidance from the Dutch embassies. Online interviews faced challenges in arranging contact with desired groups and linguistic barriers, as French and indigenous languages are predominantly spoken. Engaging with the Malian and Congolese diasporas was considered as well but could have introduced confirmation bias. Though mitigating this limitation is challenging, the research incorporates insights from existing studies employing interviews or fieldwork methodologies in Mali and the DRC. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the author did not control these studies and may possess inherent biases or limitations of their own.

Lastly, the thesis also acknowledges the presence of a cultural bias. Coming from Western Europe and writing for a university in the same region, the author's lack of direct experience in the studied region may introduce bias when interpreting cultural differences. This is particularly significant when examining the local population's perceptions of PKOs or local ownership initiatives. To address this, the thesis undergoes thorough peer review by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, including those from the studied regions. Their insights contribute to ensuring a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding, reducing the potential impact of cultural bias on the research findings. Furthermore, because of the extensive academic literature, there are several studies that incorporated quantitative and qualitative analyses of the local perception of UN-led and regionally-led PKOs. These studies are given priority in the triangulation of data collection.

Chapter 4: Piercing Through Mali's Insurgencies

After establishing the academic debate in Chapter 2 and outlining the research design in Chapter 3, the thesis transitions to empirical analysis, commencing with examining Mali as the first case study. Initially, the chapter offers a historical overview of the conflict in Mali to contextualise the operationalisation of the PKOs. The temporal scope of this initial section spans from the declaration of the Republic of Mali on September 22, 1960, to the onset of MINUSMA in April 2013. Subsequently, attention turns to MINUSMA, highlighting its mandate, operational evolution, eventual conclusion, and the relatively *low to medium* level of local ownership integration. The chapter then delves into various African-led missions in Mali, focusing on AFISMA and the FC-G5S, and compares them to MINUSMA.

4.1 Tracing Mali's past

4.1.1 Post-colonial disunity, fragmentation, and insurgencies

From 1960 to 2012, Mali transitioned from colonisation to independence, grappling with the complexities of forging a national identity. This transition highlighted a pronounced North-South divide inherited from its colonial past. Initially, the Northern region held influence due to its role in trans-Saharan trade and Mecca pilgrimages. Still, the South gained political and economic prominence, with Bamako assuming the capital status post-independence. This shift was challenging for Northern ethnic groups, notably the Tuareg, who struggled with integration into a state they perceived as alien (Stewart, 2013). The First Tuareg Insurgency (1962-1964) underscored their sense of political and economic marginalisation, as they received minimal parliamentary representation and were excluded from benefits from development initiatives. Bamako's deliberate sidelining of Northern interests aimed to assert central authority, aggravating historical tensions (Bere, 2017).

These historical tensions stemmed from the Tuaregs' nomadic lifestyle and raids on settled communities in the North (Charbonneau, 2017). Moreover, Bamako furthered divisions within Northern communities, echoing colonial divide-and-rule tactics to maintain control, as they favoured specific Tuareg clans, deepening internal divisions in the Tuareg communities,

while also dividing the North at large (Charbonneau, 2017; Stewart, 2013). Including Northern communities in state operations thus served as a symbolic gesture to manage Northern ethnic groups, yet fell short of genuine integration efforts (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015). In addition to the entrenched North-South divide and internal divisions within the North, the Southern regions of Mali did not present an ethnically homogenous or unified stance against the North. Mali's elite strategically fed sentiments of nationalism and patriotism in the South when it was to their advantage while negating the actual developmental needs of the population in the South, causing discontent amongst some Southern communities (Stewart, 2013).

Moreover, Southern elites solidified their authority by appointing individuals of Southern ethnicities to key administrative positions in the North, including governorships. These appointed officials often governed with authoritarian tactics, prioritising military enforcement over developmental initiatives. Such governance practices deepened Northern populations' distrust and hatred toward the Southern establishment (Storholt, 2001). It is often argued that the previously described iron rule of the Southern elites directly led to the Second Tuareg Insurgency (1990-1996) (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015; Stewart, 2013; Storholt, 2001).

This rebellion saw the 1991 Tamanrasset Agreements, the 1992 National Pact, the 1996 Timbuktu Peace Agreement, and a subsequent *Cérémonie des flammes de la paix*. These events aimed to bridge the North-South rift by de-escalating tensions by withdrawing the military presence from Northern regions, integrating Northern rebels into the Malian national army, granting greater political autonomy to the North, and initiating ambitious development programs (Storholt, 2001). In return, the Tuareg armed groups that were included in the negotiations, as not all of them were, relinquished their political claims on the independence of Azawad. This is a self-proclaimed autonomous region encompassing vast parts of Northern Mali, as referenced in *Figure 3*, where most Tuaregs in Mali live.

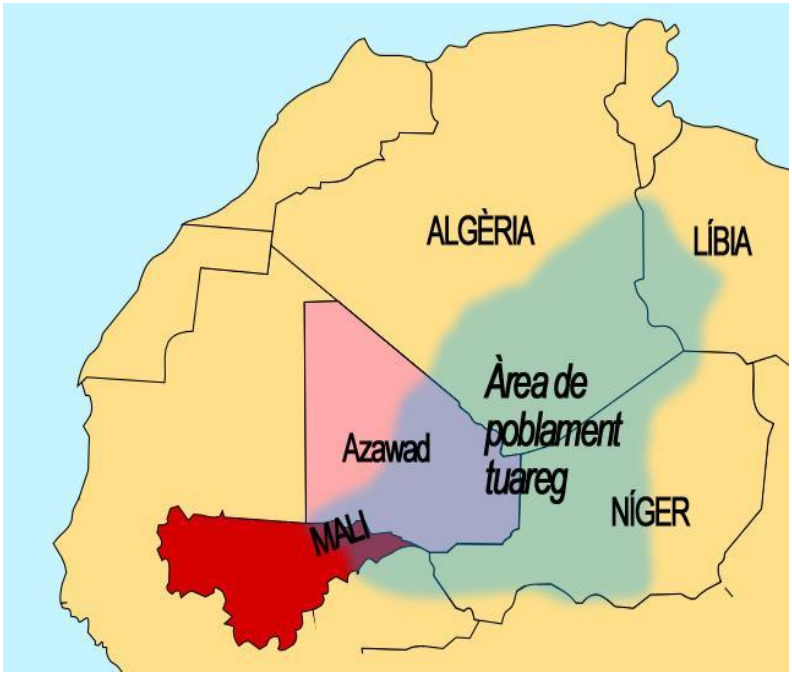

Figure 3: A visualisation of Mali (light pink + red), the claimed territory of Azawad (light pink), and the general area where Tuaregs live (light blue) (Nationalia, 2012).

Until the election of President Amadou Toumani Touré in 2002, the international community remained optimistic that these agreements would mitigate or even resolve the longstanding grievances between the North and South. Mali was briefly heralded as a democratic success story in Sub-Saharan Africa, serving as a model for post-colonial states in the region (Keita, 1998). However, a series of crises in the North, perceived favouritism, and apprehensions of renewed military intervention perpetuated Southern mistrust toward Mali's rebellious North. Simultaneously, the North grappled with persistent developmental inequalities and internal divisions. The inability of the Malian government to implement the promises made in 1992 led to the Third Tuareg Insurgency (2006-2009) (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015).

This insurgency saw another set of diplomatic efforts, including the 2006 Algiers Agreements, mediated by Algeria, and the 2009 Sebha Agreements, facilitated by Libya. The latter constituted the fifth accord since the onset of the Second Tuareg Insurgency in 1991, and both agreements mirrored previous agreements by emphasising the demilitarisation and decentralisation of Northern regions (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015). After the North was successfully demilitarised, a notable security gap emerged in crucial towns like Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal, which swiftly became exploited by terrorist entities such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), as shown in *Figure 4* (Charbonneau, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2023). The Malian government's lacklustre decisions and alleged corruption, coupled with terrorist groups' adeptness at cultivating local alliances and illicit networks, allowed them to establish quasi-governing structures effectively in the North amid the absence of a robust central authority.

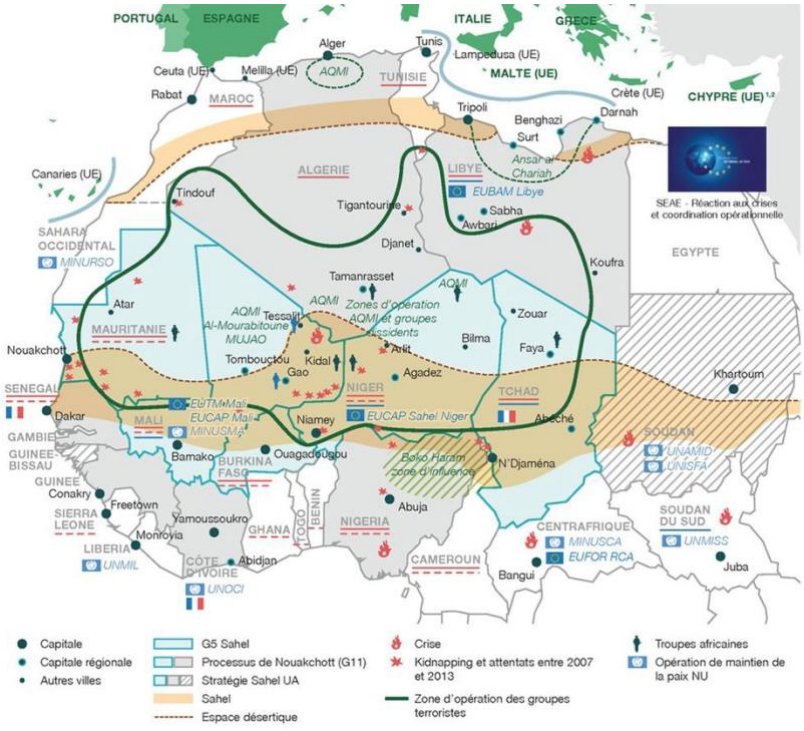

Figure 4: A visualisation of the conflicts in the Sahel, with the green line illustrating the zone of operation of terrorist groups like AQIM and Ansar Dine (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015).

Achieving local ownership has historically proved immensely challenging in conflict resolution endeavours geared at the Malian conflict, whether undertaken by non-African or African actors. Various factors contribute to this complexity, including the enduring legacy of the colonial North-South divide, the Malian elite's strategy of feeding divisions for control, internal conflicts over power and ideology within Tuareg communities, the radicalisation of the youth in the North, the international community's failure to broker lasting peace agreements, and the swiftness with which terrorist groups exploited a security vacuum.

4.1.2 The 2012 *coup d'état* and the start of MINUSMA

Beyond the historical tensions, another critical event that directly led to the 2012 *coup d'état*, which in turn led to the initiation of MINUSMA and African-led missions, was the Libyan Civil War in 2011 (Shaw, 2013). Following the removal of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, a substantial influx of weapons and young Tuareg rebels surged across Libya's borders into neighbouring Mali. This surge not only fortified various armed groups within Libya but also profoundly impacted Mali's conflict dynamics. Particularly notable was its effect on Tuareg communities, which extends into Libya, Algeria, and Niger, as shown in *Figure 3*.

The Tuaregs return to Mali introduced a group of young Tuaregs to the Northern regions, armed with military training and weapons and fueled by hatred toward any opposition (Marchal, 2012). Simultaneously, the conflict in Libya facilitated the proliferation of illicit activities, like smuggling, drug trafficking, arms trade, human trafficking, and kidnappings, as shown in *Figure 4* (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015). The emergence of extremist groups like AQIM and Ansar Dine exacerbated the situation, with the vulnerable youth becoming prime targets for recruitment (Charbonneau, 2017; Shaw, 2013).

Against this backdrop of mounting insecurity and discontent, in January 2012, Tuaregs launched a renewed offensive against the Malian government. The Fourth Tuareg Insurgency, spearheaded by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), swiftly overwhelmed Malian government forces, capturing vital Northern towns, like Timbuktu and Gao, and territories. The swift collapse of the government's authority in the North stunned the nation and exposed the inadequacies of Mali's security apparatus (Marchal, 2012). However, the somewhat overly confident Tuareg rebels were soon overshadowed by the extremist terrorist groups, whose intentions diverged from the nationalist aspirations of the MNLA. Exploiting the power vacuum and local grievances, these groups imposed their extreme

interpretation of Sharia law in the occupied territories, leading to widespread human rights abuses and the displacement of thousands of civilians (Bere, 2017; Charbonneau, 2017).

Faced with escalating crises, discontent within the Malian military reached a boiling point. On March 21, 2012, dissatisfied soldiers led by Captain Amadou Sanogo staged a mutiny, citing the government's mishandling of the Northern rebellion and the lack of support for the military. The mutiny quickly escalated into a full-fledged *coup d'état* the following day, with Sanogo and his supporters seizing power and ousting President Amadou Toumani Touré (Shaw, 2013; Stewart, 2013).

The coup and subsequent power vacuum further exacerbated Mali's instability, prompting regional and international condemnation (Al Jazeera, 2012). Amidst growing calls for intervention to restore constitutional order and address the security crisis, the UNSC passed Resolution 2085 in July 2012, authorising the deployment of AFISMA to stabilise the country (UNSC, 2012). However, the scale and complexity of Mali's crisis necessitated a more robust and integrated approach, according to the UNSC. Therefore, the UNSC transformed AFISMA into MINUSMA.

4.2 How MINUSMA failed

4.2.1 Local ownership in an evolving mandate and the Algiers Accords

Resolution 2100 of the UNSC outlines the mandate for MINUSMA, encompassing five primary objectives (2013, para. 16). Firstly, the mission is tasked with stabilising key population centres and assisting in the restoration of state authority across Mali. Secondly, it supports the implementation of the transitional roadmap, including facilitating the national political dialogue and electoral processes. Thirdly, MINUSMA is mandated to protect civilians and UN personnel. Additionally, the mission is directed to promote and safeguard human rights. Finally, MINUSMA is tasked with supporting humanitarian assistance, preserving cultural heritage, and facilitating national and international justice efforts.

MINUSMA's initial mandate primarily emphasises national rather than local ownership, a somewhat logical approach considering the foundational principle of state consent for UN PKOs. This focus becomes apparent when analysing the mandate's language, which predominantly revolves around MINUSMA's role in "support[ing]" or "assist[ing]" the "transitional authorities of Mali" (UNSC, 2013, paras. 16.a.i-v, 16.b.i, 16.b.iii-iv, 16.d.ii, 16.e-

g). Notably, the specific inclusion of 'the local' on a level different from the national occurs only once in the text: "[…] to exercise good offices, confidence-building and facilitation at the national and local levels, including through local partners as appropriate, in order to anticipate, prevent, mitigate and resolve conflict […]" (UNSC, 2013, para. 16.b.ii).

While this inclusion is important, its significance pales in comparison to the desirable level of integration (e.g., in most mission goals). A contextual analysis of how 'the local' is incorporated into the initial mandate reveals its susceptibility to interpretations. This ambiguity stems partly from Resolution 2100's failure to provide guidance on interpreting this paragraph, such as referencing another resolution or mission's mandate that outlines a framework for operationalising the inclusion of local partners. The resolution also lacks clarity on what constitutes a 'local partner.'

The inclusion of this subparagraph is also confined to the second goal of the mission, which focuses on supporting the implementation of the transitional roadmap. Consequently, 'the local' is effectively excluded from other aspects of the mission's objectives, even in contexts where its involvement could prove highly beneficial, such as in the development and implementation of DDR programs (par. 16.a.v.) or the efforts to rebuild the Malian security and justice sectors and rule of law (par. 16.a.iii.).

Lastly, the resolution also provides insight into the rationale behind MINUSMA's establishment. Apart from taking over responsibilities from the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), the resolution attributes MINUSMA's inception to the advancements made by terrorist organisations in January 2013 (UNSC, 2013, p. 1). However, the initial cause of the March 2012 *coup d'état* that directly led to these advancements was the Malian army's dissatisfaction with the government's handling of both the terrorist organisations' advancements *and* the Fourth Tuareg Insurgency, as described in section 4.1.

The longstanding tensions between the Tuaregs and the Malian government and army persisted regardless of the advancement of terrorist groups. In essence, any conflict resolution effort must address both the dissatisfaction of Tuareg communities as well as the presence of terrorist and rebel groups. Simply focusing on one aspect of the conflict, like the mandate of MINUSMA suggests, does not eradicate the other as both contribute significantly to the overall instability and violence in the region.

Section 4.1 supports this by underscoring the role of the Malian government and army in perpetuating the conflict through discrimination against the Tuareg ethnic group. The dissatisfaction of Tuaregs encompasses the continuous neglect of their communities by the Malian government and the violent approach to the Northern regions by the Malian army.

Additionally, the resolution's apparent support for the "Malian Defence and Security Forces[2]," despite allegations of human rights abuses (UNSC, 2013, p. 2), raises concerns about the impartiality of MINUSMA (para. 21). This bias towards state forces, in addition to disregarding Tuareg concerns in the mandate, hinders the inclusion of Northern communities in any conflict resolution strategy, including local ownership initiatives, as it undermined confidence among Northern communities in the UN as a reliable and impartial actor. Over the years, MINUSMA's mandate expanded, but while the mandate extensions have increasingly operationalised MINUSMA's tasks, mentions or operationalisation of the 'the local' or engagement with 'local actors' remain limited, occurring only a handful of times and limited to certain sub-sections of the mandate (UNSC, 2014, paras. 13.b.v, 13.c.vii; 2015, para. 14.a; 2016, para. 19.g; 2018, paras. 4, 38.d.ii; 2019, para. 28.c.ii).

The signing of the 'Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation' in 2015 marked a significant milestone in expanding the mandate of MINUSMA.[3] Resolution 2227, led by the signing of these Accords, extended the mandate of MINUSMA. Subsequent expansions of MINUSMA's mandate built on this agreement until its eventual withdrawal. Apart from facilitating the implementation of a ceasefire, the most notable amendment to the mandate concerned paragraph 14.f, which addressed MINUSMA's role in providing humanitarian assistance and supporting stabilisation projects. Specifically, it outlined MINUSMA's obligation to "contribute to the creation of a secure environment for the safe, civilian-led delivery of humanitarian assistance […] in close coordination with humanitarian actors" (UNSC, 2015, para. 14.f.i). In addition, the mission was tasked to "contribute to the creation of a secure environment for projects aimed at stabilising the North of Mali, including quick impact projects" (UNSC, 2015, para. 14.f.ii).

These additions to the mandate of MINUSMA are important as they explicitly address the need for projects to stabilise the North and facilitate the civilian-led delivery of humanitarian assistance. They enable the mission and UN development programs to actively contribute to existing efforts by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and CSOs. Nevertheless, the lack of guidelines as to how to incorporate these non-state actors limites the effectiveness. Moreover, one of the key aspects of the Algiers Accords mentioned in Resolution 2227, the ceasefire agreement, does not involve or mention 'the local' in ensuring the

[2] This thesis refers to the Malian Security and Defense Forces as the "Malian army." For consistency with Resolution 2100's language, the official name is used here.

[3] Hereinafter, this agreement is referred to as "the Algiers Accords," which is its unofficial name.

sustainability of the ceasefire, despite its vital importance, as highlighted in Chapter 2 (UNSC, 2015, para. 14.a).

Signatories to the Algiers Accords were the Malian government and the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) and the Platform of Armed Groups (the Platform), two coalitions of armed groups involved in a triangle of violence. Both coalitions comprise several smaller armed groups without one clear leader, demonstrating disunity within the coalitions. In turn, this has resulted in a lack of clarity about the problems at stake and the best ways to solve them. The one evident distinction between the two coalitions is that the CMA's movements have constantly pursued claims of self-determination in the Azawad region (see *Figure 3* in section 4.1.1), whilst the Platform's movements have tried to resolve the existing political and socioeconomic issues in Mali (see section 4.1.1) (Nyirabikali, 2015). This has complicated the establishment of a coherent agreement that addresses the root causes of the conflict, as all parties had different interests.

The Algiers Accords encounter three key challenges that pertain to local ownership and compound MINUSMA's struggles in their effective implementation. Firstly, various actors, notably CSOs, women, and youth, have been insufficiently engaged in the negotiations. This absence, critical given these groups' pivotal role in peace mechanisms, reflects a lack of political will rather than security concerns (International Crisis Group, 2020b). Secondly, the accords overlooked escalating tensions in Central Mali perpetuated by terrorist groups, focusing solely on the North, thereby neglecting interethnic conflicts and the recruitment of youth by these groups in this region. Lastly, the signatory parties' inadequate commitment hindered conflict resolution and transparency. The government lacked transparency in monitoring its commitments, failing to disclose information on funds allocation and local projects. Meanwhile, armed coalitions showed minimal engagement in disarmament programs, perpetuating internal conflicts and targeting civilians, exacerbating the challenges faced by MINUSMA in achieving peace and stability (Devermont & Harris, 2020).

In summary, the evolving nature of MINUSMA's mandate, which sporadically integrated elements of 'the local' or local ownership, coupled with the failure to implement the Algiers Accords and promised local ownership initiatives has contributed to the minimal incorporation of local ownership initiatives in official documents concerning the Malian conflict. The recent withdrawal of MINUSMA in late 2023 and the Malian interim government's withdrawal from the Algiers Accords in January 2024 can also partly be attributed to the lack of local engagement and ownership in conflict resolution strategies, as can be seen by the subdued local approval of these strategies in recent years.

4.2.2 Local ownership initiatives at different governance levels

Peacebuilding projects in Mali that the UN supports rely on various funding resources, with the PBF being the largest. MINUSMA collaborates closely with other UN entities on their projects through the PBG's Immediate Response Facility (IRF) mechanism. Three in particular stand out: the IRF-84, IRF-105, and IRF-165 (Nimaga et al., 2019, paras. 67, 165). According to a UN evaluation report, the first few PBF projects, including IRF-84 and IRF-105, logically focused on the Gao and Timbuktu regions in Northern Mali (Nimaga et al., 2019, para. 51). In these projects, MINUSMA aimed to provide health services for victims of Sexual- and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) (IRF-105) and enhance regional and national security by cantoning ex-combatants as part of its DDR programs. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is a vital way to enhance national and local ownership over peacebuilding initiatives (IRF-84). However, the evaluation found that these projects primarily addressed the socio-economic consequences of conflict rather than tackling the underlying socio-political root causes (paras. 49–55).

While this approach may have been justifiable for other early projects, like IRF-105, it proved especially troublesome for IRF-84 (Nimaga et al., 2019, paras. 55, 85–93). The DDR-Section of MINUSMA played a crucial role in implementing the Ouagadougou Preliminary Peace Agreement (OPPA) of 2013. While the UN Office for Project Services handled the logistical aspects of building cantonment sites where disarmament would take place, MINUSMA managed the project's overall guidance and political dimensions. Nevertheless, *de facto*, there was no clear project leader as technical and political considerations were often intertwined and communication faltered. Despite the project being set up in February 2014 and the cantonment sites being finished in 2016 following substantial delay, the utilisation of the sites faced significant delays because of severe delays in the DDR process. This hindered the objective of increasing security in Northern Mali and building confidence between signatories to the OPPA (para. 86).

However, the report attributes these delays in the DDR process to factors beyond the UN's control, placing the responsibility on the Malian government and the armed groups involved in the OPPA and the Algiers Accords. This suggests a failure on the side of 'the local' rather than of the UN, even though academic literature suggests that the UN also bears partial responsibility for these delays. It failed to consider those members of armed groups who had been part of past efforts to integrate former combatants in 1992 and who "were dissatisfied" with these efforts, as many "frequently deserted" (Caparini, 2015, p. 11).

The report raises further concerns, suggesting that the DDR process may have had unintended adverse effects. It indicates that the process inadvertently fostered the perception that joining armed groups could yield benefits, as this was the way the Malian government presented it during negotiations. Consequently, there was a surge from 10.000 to 17.000 former combatants seeking inclusion in the process, as they were enticed by the promise of financial benefits (Nimaga et al., 2019, para. 88). Despite the shortcomings of the Malian government, this also highlights the UN's failure to manage information flow during the negotiations of both agreements effectively. This led to confusion among certain signatory parties and ultimately hindered the achievement of local ownership at both the national and local levels.

On the other hand, the evaluation report expresses a relatively positive outlook on the other MINUSMA-involved projects (IRF-105 and IRF-165). While IRF-105 is a vital initiative as it addresses health services for victims of SGBV, it does not directly relate to local ownership initiatives through MINUSMA. Thus, it will not be explored further in this section. IRF-165 focused on establishing interim authorities in the Northern regions of Taoudénit and Ménaka. This initiative aligns with MINUSMA's role in supporting the political process following the Algiers Accords.

The final evaluation report of the mission illuminates a disparity between the suggested impact of the project on the local community and the conflict at large and the documented methods by which these impacts are assessed. The report asserts that "the project has created a climate of peace and trust between the people and the leaders, who now work together to identify and plan their development needs, which is a positive development" (United Nations Peacebuilding, 2020, p. 3). Additionally, it claims that, at the the project's completion, the two primary objectives were progressing as scheduled: (1) the interim authorities and agents of the Taoudénit and Ménaka regions were acquiring the necessary skills for community management and social cohesion, and (2) communities were engaging with planned social infrastructure and contributing to the pacification of their areas (2020, pp. 3–4).

However, the sources supporting these conclusions are lacking. The report acknowledges the absence of perception surveys or community data collection and the omission of an evaluation exercise during the reporting period (United Nations Peacebuilding, 2020, p. 5). This suggests that tangible evidence supporting these claims is insufficient, leaving uncertainties regarding the validity of these assertions. This also brings into question the effectiveness of the role of MINUSMA in adhering to its promises of the Algiers Accords to support the political process in the Northern regions.

Furthermore, General Ould Meydou, the governor of Taoudénit appointed under this project, remains in office to this day. Despite being portrayed as a success story by the UN and MINUSMA, he faces several denunciations from Malian CSOs of elitist behaviour, favouritism, and failure to represent the civilian population (Makadji, 2021; United Nations Peacebuilding, 2020, p. 3). These concerns echo those highlighted in section 4.1, which caused the Third and Fourth Tuareg Insurgencies, suggesting a failure to learn from past mistakes concerning local ownership and inclusion.

The PBF evaluation report also contends that these initiatives, including others, have fallen short in fostering local engagement, empowerment, and ownership, as well as in mitigating overall conflict levels. It asserts that despite efforts, the security landscape in the North remained profoundly unstable from 2013 to 2018, evidenced by over 340 terrorist incidents in Gao and Timbuktu alone, as documented by MINUSMA (Nimaga et al., 2019, para. 77). Moreover, recent data indicates a continued rise in violence post-report publication, suggesting that these endeavours indeed failed to protect civilians adequately, despite claims of local ownership (Marangio, 2024).

4.3 The continent's response to Mali's crisis

Since the start of the Malian crisis, two African-led missions have been prominent: AFISMA and the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S). Equally important, ECOWAS deployed special representatives in rapid response to crises like *coups d'état* (Allen, 2023). After the May 2021 *coup d'état*, the military Junta interim government declared its withdrawal from the FC-G5S in May 2022 (Marangio, 2024). Also, as said, MINUSMA completely withdrew at the end of 2023 (Jorgensen, 2023). Since then, there have been no UN-led or African-led PKOs in Mali. Despite their separate deployments, both missions faced some common challenges regarding their ability to include 'the local' and foster local ownership initiatives.

African-led missions in Mali arguably played a secondary role in peacekeeping at the local level. Despite AFISMA being the initial comprehensive response, its impact was overshadowed by parallel efforts of the EU's training mission to Mali (EUTM) and France's Operation Serval (Marangio, 2024; Stronski, 2023). While AFISMA aimed to enhance the Malian army's capacity and aid in reclaiming the North, its absorption into MINUSMA within a year hindered its ability to fully realise its complete mandate and go beyond initial security

efforts, particularly in establishing local ownership initiatives, which only formed a small part of its mandate (UNSC, 2012, para. 9; 2013, para. 7).

This transition deprived AFISMA of the opportunity to cultivate trust and collaboration among humanitarian actors, Malian authorities, and CSOs, which was part of its mandate as established in Resolution 2085. On the other hand, the FC-G5S, established amidst an overcrowded field of security initiatives by the EU (EUTM and EUCAP) and French missions (Operation Barkhane), along with MINUSMA and humanitarian initiatives by NGOs and CSOs, assumed a supportive role in Mali. Although FC-G5S was envisioned as an African-led initiative, it relied heavily on financial, logistical, and technical support from more established counterparts, mainly the EU (AU, 2017, 2019; UNSC, 2017, paras. 9–16).

Furthermore, an examination of UNSC meetings on FC-G5S reports reveals a pattern where local peacekeeping and peacebuilding achievements are credited to MINUSMA's support, highlighting the inherent reliance of African-led missions on more advanced initiatives (2022b, p. 17). This dynamic also indicates a systemic limitation in the capacity of African-led efforts to operate independently, with their effectiveness being dependent on support from more robust international actors.

To add to that, the PKOs were mainly militaristic in nature and thus more interventionist than impartial. This can be seen in the missions' goals, which focused heavily on bolstering the Malian army's capabilities in restoring order and safety. The mandates were also far less comprehensive compared to those of the UN. Where the mandate of MINUSMA evolved to incorporate more specific ways to encourage local ownership, those of the African-led missions were rarely made more detailed. They remained more descriptive in their tasks, with only additions made in the number of tasks in the mandate rather than the quality of the existing functions. Because of the aggressive and security-focused nature of the African-led missions, those projects that did pertain to establishing local ownership initiatives were for short-term security gains and, again, focused on the consequences of the conflict rather than the root causes of the conflict (UNSC, 2020, para. 12; 2022a, para. 12).

For instance, initiatives under the FC-G5S are consistently described as collaborative efforts within more extensive efforts conducted by other international actors in UNSC documents. While the specific details of these initiatives remain unspecified, they purportedly aim to address "the prevention of violent extremism and empower local authorities in security governance" (UNSC, 2022a, para. 12). Additionally, the UN asserted its continued financial support for FC-G5S programs about "regional capacity-building in the areas of criminal justice, border security management and the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism" (para.

12). These initiatives are commendable, but their implementation depends on the financial contribution of the UN and EU. Though this is not necessarily problematic, it does pose an extra condition on peace. Evidently, when the EU pulled its funding and MINUSMA left, the FC-G5S' supportive role diminished, and, therefore, the effect of its initiatives in establishing local ownership or emancipation also diminished.

Thus, African-led missions in Mali evidently encountered common challenges in incorporating local perspectives and fostering ownership initiatives. AFISMA's impact was overshadowed by parallel efforts like EUTM and Operation Serval, partially leading to its absorption into MINUSMA and hindering its ability to fulfil its mandate. The FC-G5S heavily relied on support from more established counterparts, revealing a systemic limitation in African-led missions' capacity for independent action. Moreover, both missions prioritised short-term security gains over addressing root causes and building local capacity. The recent rise of Russia in Mali further complicates local ownership efforts by undermining trust in Western-led or -supported international interventions and initiatives. These challenges highlight the imperative for African-led missions to enhance their capacity for independent action, and for the UN and other international actors to re-evaluate their supportive role for these missions.

Chapter 5: Piercing Through the DRC's Natural Resources and Armed Groups

Following the results from comparing the PKOs in Mali, this chapter examines the UN-led and African-led PKOs in the DRC. The aim is to see if there are similarities between the specific approaches to local ownership initiatives implemented by African-led PKOs compared to those in UN-led missions in the DRC. Did any challenges, as highlighted in Chapter 4, also occur in the DRC, or did the UN and African organisations approach the DRC differently? This chapter follows a structure similar to Chapter 4, beginning with a historical overview of the conflict in the DRC that prompted the missions' establishment. The temporal scope of this initial section ranges from the onset of the Rwandan genocide on April 7, 1994, to the resurgence of M23 in March 2022. It will then analyse MONUSCO, the UN-led PKO, and the African-led DRC PKOs to highlight a relatively *medium to high* level of local ownership integration in the missions.

5.1 Tracing conflict in the lungs of Africa

5.1.1 Sustaining the legacy of Hutu-Tutsi tensions and the Pretoria Accord

To begin to merely grasp the unfathomable suffering that has occurred in the DRC since the onset of the Rwandan genocide, one must let the people of the DRC speak:

> *"Back home, we were sleeping when the army came and attacked us. After they killed the children and my husband, they grabbed me and cut my body up, poured hot water and burned me. Then they all raped me. There were twenty of them. After two days, I was still lying there with the corpses, all seven children and my husband right next to me. I was in shock. And when my heart was shocked, I lost my mind. Those people were the rebels from Rwanda."*

- Gorgeta – rape survivor – Buganga, South Kivu, DRC (Steinen, 2024, 6:03-6:56)

"I will never forget that day. They started raping me while I was on top of my husband's corpse. I counted the first, second, third one, up to the twelfth rapist. When I got to the twelfth one, I heard my children crying out to me from another room: "Mother!". I lost my mind. My first child was fourteen years old; the other one was twelve years old. On that day, both were impregnated."

- Masika Katsuva – human rights activist and rape survivor – Buganga, South Kivu, DRC (Steinen, 2024, 8:16-8:59)

The conflict that perpetrates this kind of suffering finds its roots in another act of brutality, the Rwandan genocide. The Rwandan genocide unfolded in 1994 as the Hutu ethnic majority targeted the ruling Tutsi minority. This atrocity posed one of the worst failures of UN peacekeeping to safeguard civilians and prevent conflict escalation. The genocide prompted a mass migration of Tutsis and moderate Hutus to neighbouring regions, mainly to the areas surrounding Goma, a border city in North Kivu in the Eastern DRC (Koops et al., 2015b). The RPF intervened in the genocide by entering Rwanda via Uganda, ultimately establishing a Tutsi government led by Paul Kagame, the leader of the RPF. As a result, even more Hutus, both extremists and moderates, fled Rwanda, seeking refuge in camps within the DRC's Eastern provinces (Edmonds et al., 2009).

Western leaders often praise Kagame as the hero who ended the genocide. Still, he is also accused by human rights organisations of instigating a counter-genocide through the First (1996-1997) and Second Congo Wars (1998-2003) (Sundaram, 2023). After fortifying his power in Rwanda, Kagame sent a sizable force of Rwandan Tutsis to North and South Kivu. Their objectives were to pursue Hutu extremists and overthrow the dictatorship ruling the DRC (then Zaïre), which the RPF claimed harboured genocide perpetrators. With support from Uganda, this intervention led to the installation of a new regime in the DRC, marking the end of the First Congo War

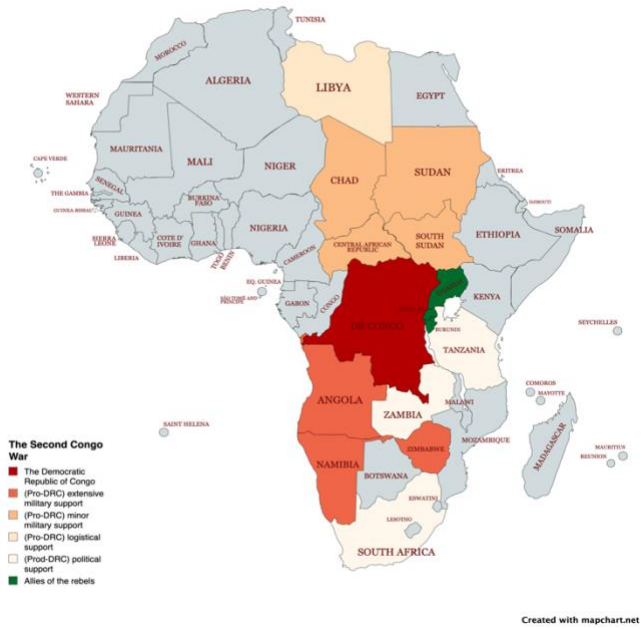

Figure 5: The conflict dynamics in the Second Congo War, also referred to as Africa's World War (self-made map based on information from various academic sources).

(Dizolele, 2021). However, when Kagame refused to withdraw his troops following an order by this new regime, he launched an even larger invasion, only halted by regional and international intervention, giving the conflict the nickname “Africa’s World War,” as evident from *Figure 5*.

With UNSC Resolution 1279, the UN deployed a comprehensive PKO to the DRC during this period, expanding upon a smaller observer mission established in 1999 (UNSC, 1999b, para. 5; 1999a, para. 8). The PKO was called the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) and was tasked with implementing the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement. In 2000, Resolution 1291 broadened MONUC’s mandate and divided the mission’s attention between the capital in the West and the escalating conflict in the East (Diehl et al., 2023a). The signing of the 2002 Pretoria Accord marked a significant change as it led to the withdrawal of Rwandan and Ugandan troops in the East, leaving a security vacuum similar to that in Mali.

Various armed groups, which had formed during and before the conflict and fought alongside the warring armies in the Second Congo War, exacerbated this vacuum as they refused to disarm (Edmonds et al., 2009). These groups aligned primarily along ethnic Hutu-Tutsi lines as they were primarily composed of the Rwandan diaspora in the DRC’s Eastern provinces. The security situation in the Eastern DRC deteriorated further as the number of armed groups increased rapidly over the years, escalating both the frequency and intensity of their attacks. Under MONUC’s deployment, these armed militias, alongside community-based Mai Mai groups, initially formed as a local defence force in response to the aforementioned security vacuum, were able to commit massacres and femicides, recruited child soldiers, perpetrated mass rapes of women and children, and carried out summary executions (Bitenga Alexandre et al., 2021; Diehl et al., 2023a).

In essence, the root of the ongoing conflict in the Eastern DRC (including Ituri, North and South Kivu) stems mainly from the protracted aftermath of the Rwandan genocide (Koch, 2014; Walsh, 2023). However, the motivations for the current conflict have changed over time, as it involves escalations, an increase in the amount of armed groups, the entry of terrorist-affiliated groups, resource exploitation, and support from various international actors toward specific armed groups or the government of the DRC and Rwanda. This proliferation of armed groups, combined with the severity of attacks and complex alliances, poses challenges for any entity attempting to establish local ownership initiatives to achieve a sustainable resolution.

5.1.2 M23 rebellion and conflict minerals

As evident from section 5.1.1, the conflict in the DRC involves numerous armed groups. These groups can be sub-divided into (1) state armed forces such as the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC), (2) militia groups like the March 23 Movement (M23), the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), and the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CODECO), (3) UN forces such as the MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) and armed blue helmets, (4) Mai Mai groups, and (5) terrorist-affiliated factions like the ADF. With over 100 armed groups operating in the Eastern DRC, each pursuing its own alliances, interests, financial networks, and agreements, the situation in the region is highly dynamic. This fluidity often leads to rapid changes, with groups sometimes collaborating one day and fighting each other the next (Koch, 2014).

Since the First Congo War, conflict in the DRC has persisted with only sporadic periods of relative peace and shifting perpetrators. In April 2012, soldiers from the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), mainly made up of ethnic Tutsis, mutinied, forming the M23 rebel group despite a recent peace agreement between the DRC and the CNDP. M23 rebelled against the DRC government and MONUC/MONUSCO, temporarily seizing Goma. In November 2013, a coalition led by the DRC government and supported by African states, the EU, UN, and AU halted the M23 rebellion, causing many members to flee to Uganda and

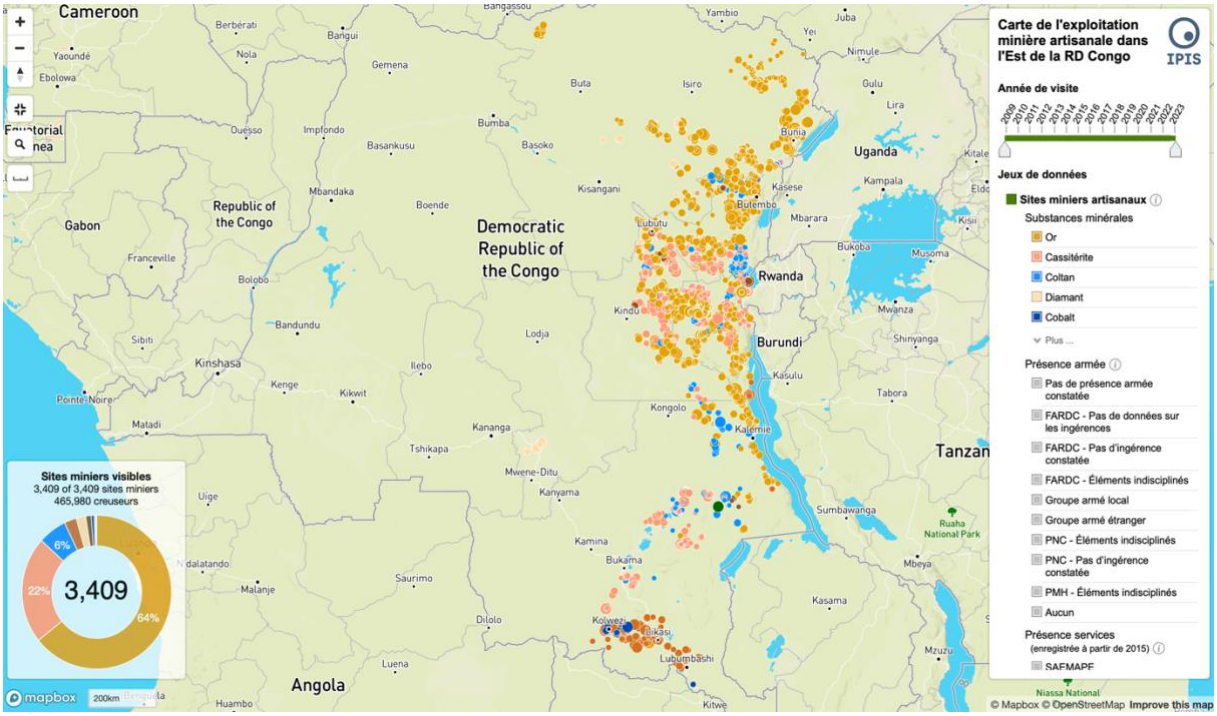

Figure 6: Map of natural resources in the DRC, including those controlled by armed groups and those that do not have reported involvement of armed groups (Delanghe & Matthysen, 2024).

Rwanda (Doss, 2014). However, in 2022, M23 reemerged, launching a new offensive in the Eastern DRC that is still ongoing and is often referred to as the Kivu Conflict (Group of Experts, 2023).

The DRC's natural resources intensify the complexity of the conflict. *Figure 6* illustrates the abundance of resources in the Eastern provinces, including tin, gold, wolframite, and coltan, alongside the vast timber reserves in the Great Lakes Basin. While it is not the root cause, resource exploitation significantly drives the ongoing conflicts, owing to the minerals' importance in global industries and consumer markets (Kara, 2023). Since the resurgence of M23 in 2022, many mines and extraction sites in the Eastern DRC have been under the control of armed groups, as shown in *Figure 7*, while more prominent groups like M23 and the FDLR dominate critical infrastructure in the region. Thus, the resources are an essential source of income for the armed groups (Delanghe & Matthysen, 2024; Pattison, 2022). The people working in these mines are often women and children, who are either forced to work there or who have been shunned by their community for being raped, often by the very soldiers who control the mines (Steinen, 2024, 9:02-10:21; 12:19-13:08).

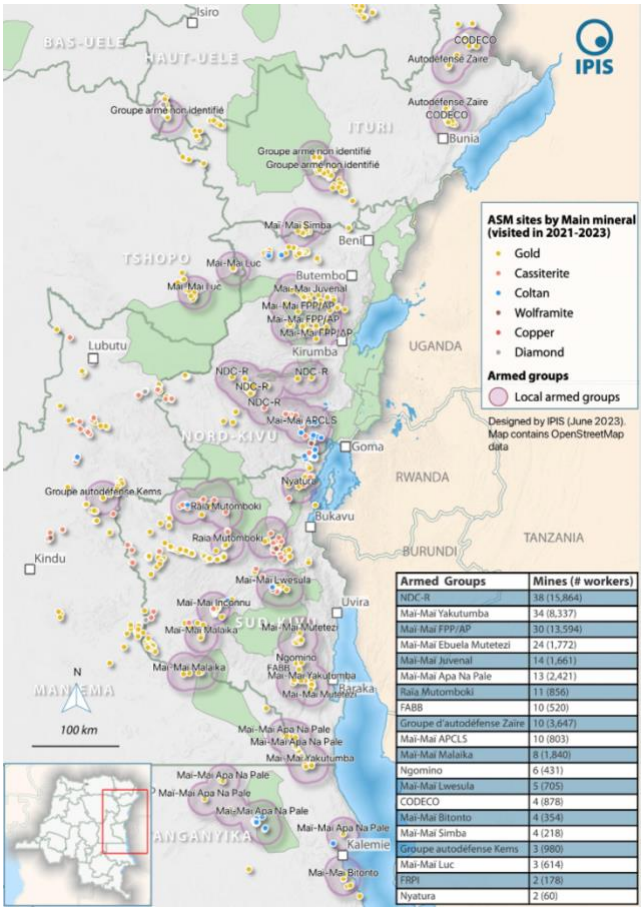

Figure 7: Conflict mineral map showcasing natural resource mines controlled by armed groups in the Eastern DRC (Delanghe & Matthysen, 2024).

5.2 The failure to weaponise peace in MONUSCO

5.2.1 Local ownership in a comprehensive mandate

Resolution 1925 of the UNSC transformed MONUC into MONUSCO due to escalating threats from the conflict in the DRC to regional peace and security (UNSC, 2010, p. 3). Unlike

MINUSMA, MONUSCO inherited a broad mandate with clear priorities (paras. 6, 12), existing facilities (para. 1), and established DDR and SSR programs (paras. 12.i-j). Its mandate also included a strong focus on combating child and gender exploitation and abuse (paras. 12.c, 12.e-f). However, local inclusion in these priorities is limited, mentioned only once regarding MONUSCO's support of "voluntary local integration or resettlement" of displaced persons and refugees (para. 12.g). The UNSC argued that such initiatives are the responsibility of the DRC government.

Yet, actively engaging with local leaders, marginalised groups, and CSOs, in collaboration with the national government, could have greatly aided in reintegrating affected populations and expanding local communities while also providing capacity-building support, as evident from the literature in Chapter 2. Beyond MONUSCO's mandate, Resolution 1925 only mentions actively involving 'the local' once more as it "encourages MONUSCO to ensure regular interaction with the civilian population to raise awareness and understanding about its mandate and activities" (para. 16). While commendable, it is crucial to note wording. The use of 'encourages' suggests that informing the local population is not a priority of MONUSCO. This is significant, as Chapter 2 has illustrated that local perception is vital for a UN PKO's sustainability (Trithart, 2023). By not making this part of MONUSCO's mandate, the UNSC undermines its own effectiveness in establishing meaningful local ownership initiatives.

Over the years, as the need for intervention grew in the DRC, MONUSCO's mandate expanded and specified its commitments. One notable expansion came with Resolution 2098, which introduced the FIB (UNSC, 2013a, para. 9). This decision was groundbreaking and controversial, marking the first time a UN PKO included a brigade authorised to use violence to protect civilians, essentially weaponising peace. Initially comprised solely of fighters from SADC countries (Malawi, South Africa, and Tanzania), the FIB was purposely formed to leverage regional organisation support for more agile rebel group combat. While the FIB achieved initial success in neutralising M23 during the rebellion described in section 5.1.2, they are unable to deal with more unconventional armed groups such as ADF, CODECO, and Mai Mai factions, which are more locally integrated and operate across a wide expanse without a unified command (Fabricius, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2020a).

This deep local integration of these groups makes them difficult to target without risking civilian casualties, whose protection, as said, is MONUSCO's first mandated priority. To compound this issue, these groups have developed a pattern of using violence for its own sake, often retaliating against civilians when government-backed forces like the FARDC and FIB attempt to engage them. Their aim is to create a situation where UN forces hesitate to

confront them, a strategy that has been successful (Fabricius, 2020; Group of Experts, 2023). Consequently, this has sparked widespread protests among locals, questioning the effectiveness of MONUSCO and the FIB in providing concrete protection (Trithart, 2023). This erosion of trust in the UN has severely hindered MONUSCO's ability to support local ownership initiatives effectively and engage with the population about its mandate and projects. While some projects related to local ownership have occurred in the Eastern DRC in recent years, they frequently were not initiated by MONUSCO, as illustrated in 5.2.2.

Radio Okapi, a UN radio broadcaster operating in the DRC since 2002, is one such tool for MONUSCO's communication with locals. It has been instrumental in facilitating reunification, pacification, democratisation, stability, and development in the country UNSC, 2021, para. 52). It is shown to be MONUSCO's most impactful service on Congolese peoples' day-to-day lives by providing critical information about attacks and developments (Ngoy, 2022). However, while Radio Okapi's importance cannot be overstated, it alone cannot establish local ownership initiatives or other peacebuilding projects. This service being argued to have had "the greatest impact on the daily lives of Congolese" should raise concerns considering MONUSCO's status as the most comprehensive UN peacekeeping mission globally, with over $1 billion allocated for UN-wide peacebuilding projects in the DRC that MONUSCO could contribute to (Ngoy, 2022, p. 1158; United Nations Multi-Party Trust Fund Office, 2024).

As stated earlier in this sub-chapter, MONUSCO inherited plans for Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration, Repatriation, Resettlement, and Community Violence Reduction (DDR/RR-CVR) programs. MONUSCO encountered similar challenges as MINUSMA, as the unstable national government showed reluctance to actively initiate and develop such programs, even though they bear the responsibility to do so. MONUSCO struggled to address the inherited issues related DDR/RR-CVR programs from MONUC. This is evident in every UNSC resolution concerning MONUSCO, where the UNSC urges the national government to play a more active role in their development, highlighting the government's lack of responsiveness to prioritise this issue (UNSC, 2010, para. 12.i; 2013a, para. 15.d; 2021, paras. 17, 19, 29.ii.g-k; 2022c, paras. 10–11, 24.ii.g-k, 28).

Moreover, the expansion of the program's name to incorporate foreign groups underscores the significant challenge MONUSCO faced in demobilising armed groups. While MINUSMA struggled with local integration in these programs, MONUSCO faced the added challenge of the large diversity and quantity of armed groups, with each sub-group requiring a tailored approach. This presented an almost insurmountable challenge for MONUSCO,

regardless of potential improvements in local ownership. This is because the effectiveness of local ownership in DDR programs hinges on the *willingness* to disarm and demobilise (Schirch & Mancini-Griffoli, 2016, pp. 74–76).

While MONUC was relatively successful in its support of national DDR programs, many rebels participated only for financial gain as the UN paid them to disarm (Edmonds et al., 2009, p. 43). The rebels MONUSCO is faced with are less willing to disarm due to lacking financial alternatives and fear of prosecution (International Crisis Group, 2020a). For instance, some FDLR fighters fear prosecution in Rwanda for genocidal crimes upon demobilisation and repatriation. Similarly, Mai Mai factions see no benefit in demobilisation, as control over natural resources provides substantial income, and reintegration into Congolese society lacks financial incentive because of the limited job opportunities in the Eastern DRC.

Moreover, those that do demobilise find themselves psychologically damaged, with no support for mental health or any financial opportunities, causing them to often fall back into old habits, as also seen in Mali (Steinen, 2024, 16:42-17:23). Over time, this has caused rape of both women and children to almost become a fact of life in the DRC, as beyond the mental health problems, there is also no judicial support for these women to trial their perpetrators. The complete dehumanisation of these women and children is a problem that is often overlooked by officials, which can cause hopelessness and distrust amongst the local population.

This also exacerbates challenges in MONUSCO's mandate, with DDR/RR-CRV programs viewed merely as a means to an end. Without a comprehensive reintegration framework, where local ownership could prove highly beneficial, and the support of the local population, these programs were doomed to fail from inception. The UNSC also did not adjust the mandate sufficiently to these challenges. This is surprising considering the UNSC also mandates the UN Group of Experts on the DRC,[4] who, since 2004, report semiannually on the changing security situation in the DRC (UNSC, 2004a, para. 10).

To add insult to injury, this Group recently reported that, instead of implementing DDR/RR-CVR programs, the DRC government has actually formed an armed group coalition known as the Volunteers in Defence of the Homeland (VDP), comprising of private military companies, several Mai Mai factions, and other armed groups (Group of Experts, 2023, para. 23). In addition to the VDP, the report states that Congolese armed groups, in their efforts to

[4] Hereinafter referred to as "Group of Experts."

"liberate" territories from "foreign" armed groups, such as the FDLR, adopted the *Wazalendo* or "true patriots" label to gain legitimacy amongst the local population (paras. 33-40).

Like the VDP, they aim to position themselves for potential integration into the FARDC as they continue to work together with the DRC government and the FARDC while also allowing themselves to pursue their own interests. Both the *Wazalendo* groups and the VDP exploited their status to recruit and expand their influence, posing a significant challenge to DDR/RR-CRV projects, let alone local ownership-focused projects. This incentivises the armed groups involved to continue their operations, either with support from the DRC government (VDP) or from the local population (*Wazalendos*).

The establishment of these two 'coalitions' can be argued to be the final blow to MONUSCO's efforts to integrate local ownership in DDR/RR-CRV projects and in any peacebuilding or security enhancement endeavours for that matter. MONUSCO's operation relies on the DRC government's consent, and with the government diverting its support away from MONUSCO's projects and seeking assistance elsewhere, it is unsurprising that the DRC government requested MONUSCO's departure as scheduled for the end of 2024.

This is particularly significant given the pivotal role the local population plays in the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping efforts. Decreasing support from the local population for the mission and its projects has been fueled by partial backing for certain armed groups and MONUSCO's inability to 'weaponise peace,' despite the projects and the mission's necessity for people's livelihoods.

There is often a contention that the DRC government is not prepared to assume MONUSCO's security responsibilities. The West Wing's working paper suggests this as well, arguing the existence of a disconnect between the needs and perceptions of the local population (The West Wing, 2024, pp. 22–25). This is particularly true with regard to Uganda, who the local population often views as 'the bad guy'

Figure 8: Thousands attended an anti-Rwanda and anti-Uganda protest in Goma in October 2022 (Al Jazeera, 2022).

because of their cooperation in the Congo Wars, as also shown in *Figure 8*. This diverges from the government's view as they increasingly work together with Uganda.

This implies that the government may not fully grasp the realities of the conflict occurring nearly across the continent, thus potentially failing to represent the needs and desires of the local population. This argument is difficult to grasp without articulating the enormous size of the DRC. Therefore, *Figure 9* shows the true size of the DRC over Europe to illustrate the fact that the DRC government, hypothetically located in The Netherlands, is dealing with a rapidly changing conflict happening on Russia's border with Belarus. Without MONUSCO's intelligence and deployment in the Eastern DRC, addressing these challenges will become even more formidable.

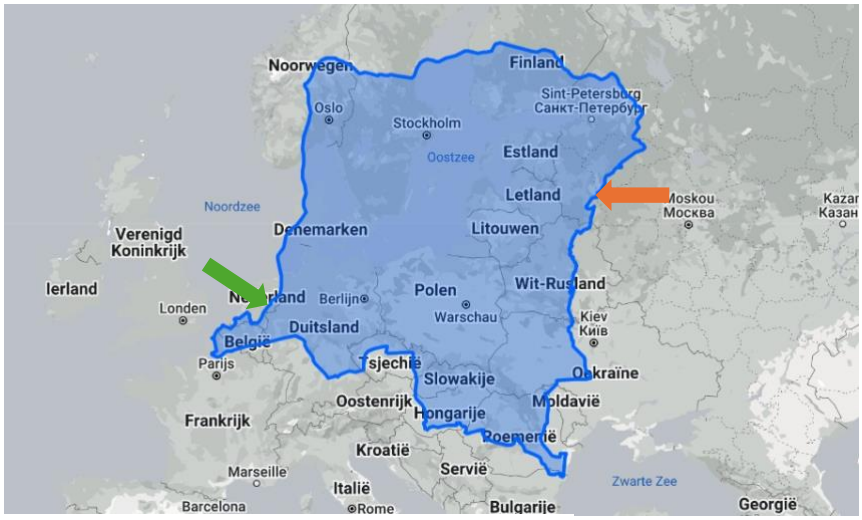

Figure 9: Visualisation of the true size of the DRC as portrayed over Europe, with the green arrow indicating where Kinshasa is located and the orange arrow indicating where Goma is located (self-made map using *thetruesize.com*)

Relating this to MONUSCO's mandate, recent UNSC resolutions have notably become less comprehensive, with sometimes a fifth of the text relating to the mission's mandate being removed. While the UN contends that this has not affected the mission's daily operations, it is undeniable that the overall impact has been significant, as the responsibilities have become less detailed and more open to interpretation. Moreover, there has been a sharp decrease in the inclusion of 'the local' in recent resolutions. For instance, Resolution 2666 mentions 'the local' only six times, with just three of those mentions somewhat relating to local inclusion but none relating to local ownership (UNSC, 2022c).

Furthermore, the recent resolutions significantly overlook the role of locals and CSOs in aiding peacebuilding processes. Given the DRC's reluctance to involve locals and CSOs in conflict resolution, *more* mentions of these actors would have been preferable. This exclusion has arguably led to a decline in MONUSCO's role in engaging the local population effectively, allowing regionally-led PKOs to take some precedence. Since Resolution 2666, every subsequent resolution has included a mention of "support" to, for example, the EAC Regional Force (EACRF), established in 2022 in the DRC (UNSC, 2022c, para. 17; 2023a, para. 20).

However, the vague language of UNSC resolutions leaves the operationalisation or ownership of this support unclear. The mandate of MONUSCO does not specify how it should support this regional mission beyond information sharing. With the capabilities of a PKO, limiting the mandate to information sharing raises questions about why MONUSCO is not actively defining what this support entails. This ambiguity is a recurring issue, particularly regarding support for local ownership initiatives and RECs. Such ambiguity hampers the mission's effectiveness, as it leaves room for conflict over the interpretation of the mandate rather than active decision-making based on it.

5.2.2 Local ownership at different governance levels

The PBF-funded peacebuilding initiatives in the DRC focus on empowering women and youth across various regions of Eastern DRC. Unlike in Mali, the PBF has not released a comprehensive evaluation report of its portfolio in the DRC. Instead, it has published evaluations of specific missions it funded, often in separate documents and in French. Like MINUSMA, MONUSCO has supported multiple projects funded by the PBF. However, MONUSCO's effectiveness is not always viewed as exceptional. While some projects have been effective in certain areas, they have struggled to achieve more than providing platforms for local voices. The IRF-262 project (funded by the PBF) and the Pamoja Kwa Amani project (PKA) (funded by the Coherence Fund for Stabilisation) stand out in this regard. Both projects aimed to establish local ownership at the community level.

IRF-262 operated in the Tanganyika province of East DRC, which shares borders with South Kivu and, therefore, also faces targeted attacks by various armed groups. It focuses on addressing two conflicts stemming from the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. The first conflict involves indigenous Bantu farmers in the region, who have clashed with Tutsis attempting to settle and farm the land. The second conflict is a communal conflict with the Twa, another ethnic minority group from the region, including Rwanda. The latter conflict has resulted in the destruction of hundreds of villages, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, and severe cases of SGBV (Lututala, 2021, pp. 3–4). IRF-262 aimed to facilitate inter-ethnic dialogues and enhance community trust to address these conflicts, with a focus on the latter conflict.

The evaluation report highlights positive outcomes in addressing the conflict between the Twa and the Bantu. Despite acknowledging the limitations inherent in any project, it emphasises that the positive impact has largely resulted from several key factors. Firstly, the

project effectively leveraged existing local structures to achieve its goals. Secondly, it successfully engaged CSOs in the peacebuilding process, tapping into their capacity to contribute meaningfully. Thirdly, it involved the sub-national government of the province, which also actively contributed to its effectiveness. Lastly, the project benefited from support from three UN institutions, which played crucial roles in fundraising, monitoring activities, and honouring memorandums of understanding (MoU) with local implementing partners. However, notably, MONUSCO was not among these three institutions, despite significant requests for its active involvement in the project (Lututala, 2021, pp. 68–69).

In the project, MONUSCO's main role was to facilitate dialogue and cooperation with the provincial government, such as during the establishment of the MoU. However, the report highlights a significant issue: key officials in the provincial government, including the Minister of Gender crucial for the project's gender lens, were unaware of both the MoU's existence and the positive project outcomes. This lack of awareness stemmed from the failure of a joint commission, responsible for overseeing the implementation of the MoU and composed of MoU signatories including MONUSCO, to function properly as it was never set up. CSOs effectively facilitated inter-ethnic dialogues between the Twa and Bantu communities with project support (Lututala, 2021, p. 54).

MONUSCO did not fulfil its obligation under the MoU effectively, which was incorporating the provincial government in the dialogue. Therefore, falling short of incorporating the sub-national level of governance into a local-level project. It is unsurprising that MONUSCO encountered shortcomings in this project. While the mission played an undeniably significant role in initiating and sustaining local peacebuilding efforts, inherent limitations hindered its full success. MONUSCO's inadequacies in this project partially stem from its mandate focusing on the *encouragement* to facilitate dialogue rather than taking a more comprehensive approach.

One crucial limitation of bottom-up approaches to local ownership, as discussed in Chapter 2, lies in the extent of their impact and sustainability within broader political dynamics. For a local ownership initiative to be sustainable beyond the project's lifespan, there must be strong connections between local, sub-national, and potentially national levels. When the project concludes, it is essential for the sub-national or national government to allow for the continuation of the efforts independently, without reliance on external support such as the UN. Unfortunately, this is precisely where MONUSCO faltered. MONUSCO's failure to facilitate this transition contributed to the project's shortcomings as a key player in bridging communication gaps between local actors and sub-national, and national actors.

Similar shortcomings were evident in the PKA project in the Ituri province, heavily impacted by targeted attacks from terrorist-affiliated groups like ADF. In this project, comprising various smaller initiatives, MONUSCO's primary role was to facilitate the mobilisation of political actors through the good offices of mission leadership. A pivotal aspect of this project involved facilitating the Democratic Dialogue between the national government and the Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri (FRPI).

This dialogue ultimately resulted in a peace accord made possible partially because of the UN project and was deemed a "major success" in the mission's evaluation document (Bouvy & Nzweve, 2020, p. 7). MONUSCO's DDR/RR-CRV Section played a role in this success by overseeing the pre-cantonment of FRPI militiamen in two MONUSCO-built camps, leading to a "sharp reduction in violence against civilians and a clear improvement in the security situation" (p. 7). This success suggests that MONUSCO effectively supported an imitative focused on local ownership, which also contributed to fulfilling its mandate.

However, MONUSCO ultimately failed to maintain its duty of bridging the gap between the national and local levels, as the conflict between the FRPI and the FARDC reignited soon after the peace deal was signed and one of the cantonment camps was burned to the ground. Furthermore, acts of violence against civilians continue to occur in Ituri, perpetrated partially by the FRPI. While MONUSCO demonstrates strong support for local ownership initiatives, it repeatedly falls short in ensuring their sustainability.

Although there have been instances of success, it could be argued that these achievements are overshadowed by a part of the armed group's resistance to disarmament efforts. Additionally, the resurgence of violence, fueled by collaboration with other militias, undermines the short-term reduction in conflict achieved by MONUSCO's programs. This temporary success, therefore, can be seen as a relative failure, as it merely addresses the symptoms of the conflict without offering a sustainable solution.

The project's evaluation report sheds light on MONUSCO's struggles in supporting local ownership initiatives, highlighting communication difficulties as a key issue. This issue is attributed to MONUSCO's complexity and internal divisions. For example, while MONUSCO did adopt a more comprehensive approach to the dialogue in this project, the approach was not executed optimally as the mission opted for a 'classic' DDR strategy whereas during the dialogue with the FRPI, it was decided that a community approach would work better. Misunderstandings also arose regarding handling children associated with the FRPI, as MONUSCO's mandate urged a strong stance on this matter which caused a strain on the dialogue. Changes in MONUSCO's stance, like statements suggesting disinterest in discussing

amnesty and ranks, despite years of support, raised doubts about its commitment (Bouvy & Nzweve, 2020, p. 23).

This echoes the critique outlined in Chapter 2 concerning the UN's multidimensional stabilisation missions, which are often deemed too extensive to address complex contexts effectively. This observation applies here, too, as the intricate nature of the conflict in Eastern DRC has resulted in a continuously expanding mandate, as illustrated in section 5.2.1. This raises the question of whether this type of UN peacekeeping remains suitable for contemporary conflict dynamics, particularly evident in the DRC and other conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Mali.

5.3 The continent's involvement in the DRC's conflict

The GLR encompasses several RECs, with some countries belonging to multiple groups, as shown in *Figure 10*. Among these, the DRC stands out as the sole nation in the region to be affiliated with four groups: the SADC, EAC, ICGLR, and the ECCAS. UNSC Resolution 2389 acknowledges the support provided by these RECs in "promoting political processes" and "finding peaceful solutions for the conflict situations in the region" (2017a, para. 11). The AU, in its *communiqué* of its 1203rd meeting, also endorsed the efforts of these RECs (2024, para. 8). All the countries

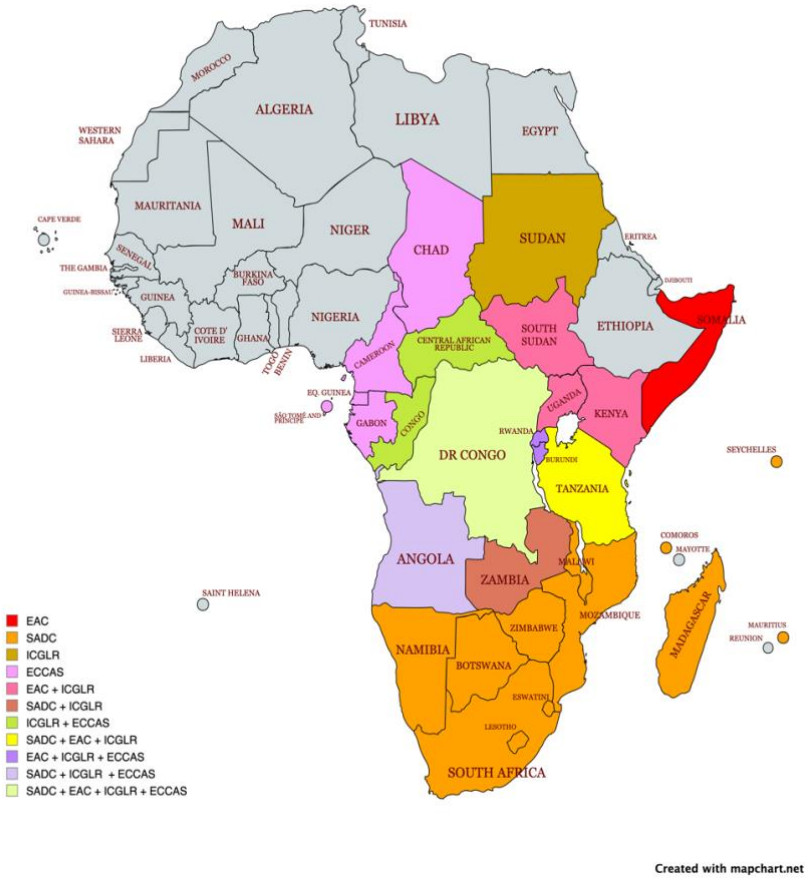

Figure 10: The Member States of various African regional groups which, as per UNSC Resolution 2389, have contributed to the peacebuilding efforts in the Eastern DRC (self-made map based on the groups' websites).

depicted in *Figure 10* are also members of the AU, which facilitates coordination among the various RECs and supports numerous initiatives within the DRC.

Figure 10 highlights a key challenge in regional peacebuilding and local ownership in the Eastern DRC: an abundance of stakeholders involved. While it is typically beneficial to have multiple institutions engaged in conflict resolution to ensure thorough attention, the situation in the Eastern DRC presents a unique problem. The region's economic potential means that resolving the conflict would directly benefit numerous regional economic partnerships, as it would facilitate legal trade in critical resources and bolster their economies.

This situation raises a significant risk of states intervening in the DRC based on their own interests, prioritising their agendas over humanitarian concerns and local ownership initiatives. Moreover, apart from the regional groups, the AU, UN, CSOs, and NGOs also implement local ownership projects and offer humanitarian aid. Due to previous communication difficulties among these entities, as shown before, it is highly probable that there are overlapping projects or initiatives with similar goals but different approaches. This could cause confusion among the local population and undermine the effectiveness of these efforts and, by extension, the interventions themselves.

The East African Community

The SADC and the EAC initiated intervention missions in the DRC, favouring a military focus over politically focused solutions, mirroring those initiatives in Mali. The EACRF's withdrawal from the DRC, prompted by local and national protests against its effectiveness in halting armed groups' advancements and protecting civilians, underscored the failure of previous regionally-led initiatives across Sub-Saharan Africa (Mutinda, 2023). The intervention's military focus, despite numerous efforts to establish political dialogues between the DRC government and armed groups, sidelines peacebuilding projects, including local ownership initiatives. Additionally, the mission's partiality, siding with the FARDC against armed groups despite its mandate stating it is a "neutral" force, complicated dynamics as the FARDC collaborated with groups, such as certain Mai Mai factions, the EACRF was actively fighting (Lizzo, 2023).

Moreover, within the EAC, countries directly bordering the Eastern DRC, notably Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda, are involved in the conflict and part of the EAC. Despite tensions and allegations against Uganda and Burundi, the DRC allowed their troops' deployment but excluded Rwandan troops for obvious reasons. Friction persisted, however,

among EAC members as there was a severe lack of trust between the DRC, Uganda, and Burundi, and no emphasis on confidence-building efforts prior to the establishment of the EACRF, which ultimately undermined its overall effectiveness. While initial advantages of the EACRF deployment existed, such as shared REC membership and East African leaders' understanding of the conflict, the disadvantages outweighed them.

Maybe the biggest underutilisation of the mission's potential power is the exclusion of Rwanda from the force as a sustainable solution is highly unlikely without the incorporation of Rwanda. The mission lacked political will and cohesion to address grassroots governance issues and further underutilised potential logistical, technical, and financial support from more robust institutions, like the AU, considering it was the EAC's first intervention. This, in combination with a focus on the national governance level, led to the underdevelopment of peacebuilding projects, especially those that focused on the local level of peacebuilding ownership.

The Southern African Development Community

The SAMIDRC intervention mission, deployed on December 15, 2023, is currently ongoing (AU, 2024, para. 9). This marks the second SADC intervention in the DRC within a decade, targeting the same rebel group: M23 (ACCORD, 2016). This situation raises questions about the effectiveness of this regional force in the DRC, as its mandate focuses primarily on combating M23, a group previously declared defeated by the SADC, without addressing other groups or engaging in political processes and peacebuilding initiatives. Critics argue that the SADC's return to fight the same enemy a decade later suggests the need for a different approach, which has yet to materialise and thus is not yet visible in the current mandate (Fabricius, 2024).

Moreover, SAMIDRC appears to be diverting critical resources from another SADC mission in Mozambique. Although the Mozambique mission is set to end in July 2024, which could potentially free up resources for SAMIDRC, this will only be beneficial if the Mozambique mission is successful (Fabricius, 2024). However, it has not been, as insurgents remain active in the North. This situation suggests that SADC troops are struggling to manage multiple conflicts simultaneously. While this is not inherently problematic, abandoning one conflict to address another created a troubling scenario where the REC must decide which conflict is worse and which humanitarian crisis is more urgent, an ethically questionable approach. Additionally, Rwandan troops were also deployed in Mozambique to fight the same

rebels as the SADC. It is somewhat ironic that the SADC is now engaging in a war with its former ally in a different conflict.

The Economic Community of Central African States

The DRC is also a member of the ECCAS, another REC. Unlike the EAC and SADC, ECCAS has not sent an interventionist mission to the DRC. However, at the request of the DRC government, ECCAS did send an electoral observation mission to assist with the most recent election in December 2023 (ECCAS, 2023, p. 1). This does not mean that ECCAS lacks an interventionist force. The 2000 Mutual Assistance Pact established the Central African Multinational Force (FOMAC), a joint peacekeeping force within ECCAS. As illustrated in *Figure 11*, FOMAC is part of ECCAS' comprehensive structure for peace and security among its Member States. ECCAS has had a formidable-looking governing framework in place since 1983, but it has not yet deployed FOMAC for a military intervention in the DRC.

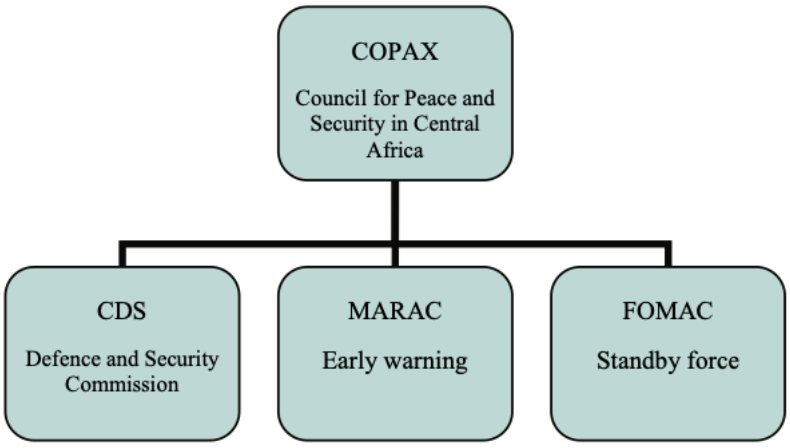

Figure 11: The ECCAS organs relating to peace and security. The ECCAS' General Secretariate directly oversees COPAX (Elowson & Wilund, 2011, p. 36).

This is because similar limitations seen in the EAC and SADC affect ECCAS. There is a clear gap between ECCAS' peacekeeping formulation and their operationalisation. As shown in *Figure 10*, ECCAS comprises mostly politically unstable countries with diverse perspectives on regional conflicts, particularly between Angola and Rwanda and between the DRC and Rwanda. Poor diplomatic relations among Member States hinder the bloc from rallying behind a single regional leader to guide intervention efforts. In contrast, the EAC has Kenya and, to a lesser extent, Tanzania, while the SADC has South Africa as strong leaders with diplomatic, economic, and military capacities to lead interventions. The ECCAS lacks such a force.

This distrust and competition among Member States also leads to insufficient funding and personnel needed for a successful intervention mission. Consequently, ECCAS does not actively support or initiate peacebuilding projects, let alone those that emphasise local

ownership. However, because the bloc includes Rwanda and the DRC – key players in resolving the conflict through local ownership – and one of the core mediators, Angola, ECCAS has the potential to influence the conflict positively. This potential could again be realised with support from more financially robust institutions like the AU and in collaboration with other RECs.

The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region

The ICGLR's 2013 Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the Region, also known as the Framework of Hope, focuses on stabilising the DRC, particularly its Eastern provinces. It sets clear benchmarks for collaboration between the ICGLR, the DRC, the UN, and CSOs (ICGLR, 2013). Additionally, the ICGLR's 2006 Regional Programme of Action for Peace and Security provides a framework for the group's peacebuilding initiatives across the region shown in *Figure 10*. As shown in *Figure 12*, this programme is divided into two sub-programmes and seven projects, which are implemented in 12 different border zones (ICGLR, 2006, paras 14–15).

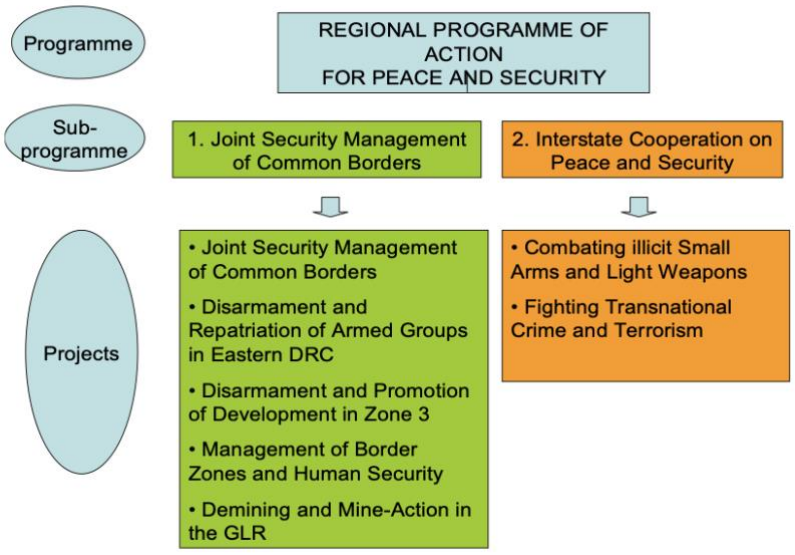

Figure 12: The framework of the RPAPS (ICGLR, 2006)

Both reports emphasise leveraging existing local structures and mechanisms through collaboration with CSOs and the local population to promote security and peace, intentionally prioritising local ownership in peacebuilding initiatives. This has not been seen before in the core documents of the previously talked about RECs, UN, and AU documents and is, therefore, a welcome addition. The 2013 Framework of Hope and the evident focus on the DRC in the 2006 Programme's projects highlight the ICGLR's view that the core of the region's instability lies in the conflict in Eastern DRC. This perspective aligns with the findings from the West Wing's working paper, where several interviewees noted that stability in the GLR depends on resolving the conflict between the DRC and Rwanda (The West Wing, 2024, pp. 66–69).

The ICGLR emphasises local ownership in its peacebuilding strategy documents by, for example, detailing how to operationalise the projects shown in *Figure 12* of its 2006 Programme. However, the group faces challenges as well. For example, the lack of political will among Member States to implement these plans. This reluctance is mainly due to the high financial costs of the projects, which the ICGLR relies on Member States and international actors to fund. Despite Member States largely meeting their financial obligations, their weak economies mean the contributions are insufficient and international financial support for the ICGLR has declined over the years.

The EU's 2023 Great Lakes Strategy has somewhat revived this lack of financial support, funding a new project called the Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region Project. This project, enacted by the ICGLR and IMPACT, aims to help Member States manage artisanal mineral flows and harness their potential for economic and social development (Irakoze, 2024). This renewed collaboration potentially addresses another challenge the ICGLR faces in implementing local ownership initiatives: the conditions necessary for effective collaboration with CSOs (Kanyangara, 2016). As highlighted before, the main issue is the sheer number and diversity of civil society stakeholders in the DRC and the region. These CSOs vary greatly in size, location, capacities, and focus, with each one, as most require different collaborative approaches.

The ICGLR leads in incorporating local ownership into its official projects and documents. However, like other regional groups, it faces challenges in the operationalisation and funding. Despite these issues, the ICGLR is in a favourable position. It does not need to expand its inclusion of local ownership in its documents, which would require lengthy diplomatic negotiations, especially given the region's current instability. Instead, it can focus on increasing collaboration with CSOs.

This can be achieved by formalising the relationship with CSOs and being more transparent about its projects, frameworks, mechanisms, and peacebuilding tools. This transparency would enhance a CSO's ability to support a project that aligns with their focus areas. Lastly, because it does not have an interventionist force which makes it difficult to assess its ability to incorporate local ownership in a regionally-led PKO, it can enhance its cooperation with interventionist RECs, like the EAC, SADC, and ECCAS. These groups evidently struggle with this incorporation of local ownership. An increased cooperation where the ICGLR takes on more of the peacebuilding responsibilities could present a dynamic collaboration.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates that the current methods for implementing local ownership in PKOs fail to enhance their effectiveness in achieving mission goals, regardless of whether the PKO is led by the UN or a regional organisation. The findings presented above mean that the hypothesis outlined in section 2.1.1 cannot be rejected. Through a focused and comparative study of two significant case studies in Sub-Saharan Africa – Mali and the DRC – the analysis supports this conclusion by revealing overarching patterns in the case studies that highlight the inefficacy of the current approaches.

The cooperation between UN-led PKOs, other UN institutions, and regional forces on peacebuilding projects is severely inadequate. This is primarily due to the numerous interventionist stakeholders and a severe lack of communication among them. Additionally, UN PKOs face challenges in quickly adapting their mandates to the fast-changing conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa. Regional groups, though often quicker to respond initially, struggle with financial, technical, and logistical limitations, making them reliant on more robust institutions like the UN for support, which makes them also slow to adapt to changes.

Local ownership initiatives depend on support from various levels of governance to succeed. PKOs play a crucial role in amplifying local voices, but they often fail to fulfil this responsibility, leading to increased distrust among the local population in these PKOs' ability to protect and aid them. Lastly, local ownership and peacebuilding are frequently viewed as mere means to an end rather than integral components of a sustainable peace framework. This is evident in DDR programs in Mali and the DRC, which often lack adequate adaptation to the unique conflict situations. In Mali, programs are not tailored to specific needs, while in both Mali and the DRC, combatants who disarm are left without economic opportunities or psychological support, causing many to revert to armed conflict and related SGBV actions.

These issues significantly hinder the implementation of local ownership in PKO projects. However, the AU could address these challenges by taking a more prominent role in peacekeeping and peacebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa. As the only regional institution covering the entire continent, the AU can mobilise and distribute resources effectively, enhancing national ownership of peacebuilding efforts. In turn, collaborating with RECs would strengthen localised initiatives. The AU's political and diplomatic capabilities are crucial for integrating peacebuilding and peacekeeping strategies, while RECs can handle military support if necessary.

Despite its potential, the AU faces challenges, such as defining its identity by often unsuccessfully modelling itself after either the EU or the UN. To add to this, the AU's limited capacities compared to the EU, NATO, and the UN pose problems, as it must address multiple conflicts across the continent, including in Mali and the DRC, but also in countries like Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Somalia. To overcome these challenges, the UN must rethink its role in PKOs and international peacekeeping. The UNSC should adopt a more supportive role, similar to the EU's approach, which allows regional organisations to lead peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts. Clear multilateral guidelines and bilateral agreements, such as those outlined in Resolution 2719, are needed between the AU, UN, RECs, other regional organisations, and CSOs. Establishing concrete rules, frameworks, and agreements will enable the AU to become the principal actor in local ownership initiatives across Sub-Saharan Africa.

This research highlights the unique situations in Mali and the DRC while showcasing the overarching challenges in how local ownership is currently implemented in PKOs. Although further research is needed, this thesis identifies key issues and their root causes, which should inform the policy implications mentioned before. Future research on local ownership in PKOs should focus on comparative studies between Sub-Saharan Africa and other conflict regions to identify unique challenges and successful strategies, modifying methods to specific regional contexts. Investigating gender-specific approaches is also crucial, as gender dynamics significantly influence peacebuilding, and the inclusion of women can enhance mission effectiveness, especially given the high levels of SGBV in Sub-Saharan African conflicts.

Researchers should also examine best practices from success stories like Rwanda, where post-genocide reconciliation and development programs effectively engaged local communities, fostered national unity, and promoted economic development. Despite not being part of a PKO and with sometimes questionable methods to reach these successes, Rwanda's experience underscores the importance of community involvement, trust-building, and sustainable development. Focusing on these areas will help develop more effective strategies for local ownership in PKOs, leading to more sustainable and inclusive peacebuilding efforts and reducing violence against local populations.

Ensuring the protection of the local population must remain the central focus of any PKO. Many Sub-Saharan African countries have endured prolonged suffering due to occasionally questionable peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts. The local population rightfully deserve an equal opportunity to live a life free from the burdens of conflict and instability.

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