

WORKINGPAPER

No. 06, 2026

Beyond Borders: Evaluating EAC and SADC Roles in Sustainable Peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of Congo Polycrisis

Jacob Lisakafu



UNU
CRIS

Authors

Jacob Lisakafu is a senior lecturer in politics and international relations at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, History and Philosophy, Open University of Tanzania. He holds a PhD in Global Studies from the Graduate Center for Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Leipzig, Germany. His research interests centre on the current dynamics of international relations and mechanisms for ensuring global security. He primarily focuses on the new African Peace and Security Architecture, international organisations, post-conflict reconstruction, and security regionalisms, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5971-1283>.

About UNU-CRIS

The United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) is a research and training institute of the United Nations University, a global network engaged in research and capacity development to support the universal goals of the United Nations and generate new knowledge and ideas. Based in Bruges, UNU-CRIS focuses on the provision of global and regional public goods, and on processes and consequences of intra- and inter-regional integration. The Institute aims to generate policy-relevant knowledge about new patterns of governance and cooperation and build capacity on a global and regional level. UNU-CRIS acts as a resource for the United Nations system, with strong links to other United Nations bodies dealing with the provision and management of international and regional public goods.

The mission of UNU-CRIS is to contribute to generate policy-relevant knowledge about new forms of governance and cooperation on the regional and global level, about patterns of collective action and decision-making.

UNU-CRIS focuses on issues of imminent concern to the United Nations, such as the 2030 Development Agenda and the challenges arising from new and evolving peace, security, economic and environmental developments regionally and globally. On these issues, the Institute will develop solutions based on research on new patterns of collective action and regional and global governance. The Institute endeavours to pair academic excellence with policy-relevant research in these domains.

For more information, please visit www.cris.unu.edu

in alliance with



Abstract

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) exemplifies a “polycrisis,” where overlapping security, humanitarian, economic, and governance challenges perpetuate instability and regional insecurity. This article critically evaluates the roles of the East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) in peacebuilding amidst the DRC’s protracted crisis. Drawing on regional security complex theory and neofunctionalism, alongside qualitative data from elite interviews and document analysis, the study interrogates the effectiveness and limitations of recent EAC and SADC interventions, including military deployments, political mediation, and joint initiatives. Findings reveal that while regional organizations have demonstrated a willingness to address the DRC’s multidimensional crises, their efforts are constrained by divergent interests, resource deficits, institutional overlaps, and operational fragmentation. The persistent reliance on external actors further underscores the limitations of current regional frameworks. The study argues for a shift toward more integrated, security-conscious, and politically unified regional strategies, emphasizing multidimensional cooperation, trust-building, and adaptive governance. Lessons from the DRC highlight the necessity of synergizing regional and international responses and reimagining African regionalism to address complex, transnational crises. These insights are vital for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners aiming to enhance the effectiveness of regional peacebuilding in Africa.

Keywords

Regionalism, Polycrisis, Democratic Republic of Congo, Conflict, Regional Integration, EAC, SADC

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Table of Contents	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Theoretical Framework	6
3. Material and Methods	6
4. Understanding Polycrisis, Regionalism, and Conflict	7
5. Regionalism as a Response to Polycrisis	7
6. Origins and Development of the DRC Conflict	8
7. Recent Developments	9
8. SADC's Role in the Conflict Settlement	9
9. The Force Intervention Brigade and Peacekeeping Innovation	10
10. The SAMIRDC Mission (2023-2025) and Recent Setbacks	10
11. EAC's Intervention in the DRC Polycrisis	11
12. EAC-SADC Cooperation and AU Partnership	12
13. Partnership with the African Union	12
14. Findings and Discussion of the EAC-SADC's Role in the DRC Polycrisis	13
14.1 From Theoretical perspective and practical implication	13
14.2 The Promise and Pitfalls on Regional Responses	13
14.3 Divergent Approaches and shared Obstacles	13
14.4 Progress And Gaps on Coordination and Cooperation	14
14.5 The Polycrisis effect: Complicating Integration and Cooperation	14
14.6 External Mediation and its implications	14
15. Lessons Learned and Implications for Regionalism: Insights from the DRC Polycrisis	14
16. Conclusions	15
References	16

1. Introduction

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) stands at the epicenter of one of the world's most continuing and multifaceted crises. The complexity and longevity of the DRC's instability have rendered it emblematic of a "polycrisis"—a situation where interlocking security, humanitarian, governance, economic, and environmental crises reinforce and amplify one another, creating systemic challenges that far exceed the capacity of any single institution or approach to resolve (Tooze, 2022; WEF, 2023; Ang, 2024). The DRC's crisis has persisted for decades, with its eastern regions especially marked by recurrent armed conflict, large-scale displacement, human rights abuses, and chronic underdevelopment (AU, 2025a; OCHA, 2025).

Multiple armed groups—including the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), and the March 23 Movement (M23)—continue to contest state authority,¹ fuelled by competition over mineral wealth, ethnic divisions, and cross-border dynamics (Muraya and Ahere, 2014; Rufanges & Aspa, 2016). The result is a humanitarian catastrophe: millions have been displaced, food insecurity has reached record levels, and the spill over effects have destabilised neighboring countries, intensifying regional tensions (AU, 2025b; UN, 2025a). The United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded almost 738,000 population displacements in 2024 due to ongoing Kivu conflicts (OCHA, 2025), with at least 230,000 internal displacements in early 2025 in Kivu provinces alone. The repercussions of this ongoing crisis extend far beyond the DRC's borders. The conflict has catalysed massive refugee flows, cross-border violence, regional economic disruption, and political tensions among neighboring states, particularly Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda. The withdrawal of the United Nations stabilisation mission (MONUSCO) in 2023—amid concerns of an emergent security vacuum—further complicated regional dynamics (UN, 2023).

Against this backdrop, regional organisations have assumed growing importance in efforts to stabilise the DRC and promote sustainable peace. The East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC)—two major regional blocs with overlapping memberships and mandates—have taken on increasingly active roles in peacekeeping, political mediation, economic integration, and humanitarian support. The East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) deployed in November 2022, and the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC) will deploy in December 2023, representing significant recent interventions aimed at restoring peace and security in eastern DRC.

However, despite their efforts, both organisations have faced substantial challenges and mixed results. Political disagreements, diverging strategies, resource constraints, and the sheer complexity of the DRC's polycrisis have limited the effectiveness of these interventions. For example, the SADC concluded their mission without achieving peace (Handy, 2025a), whereas the withdrawal of the EACRF was owed to political disagreements between Kinshasa and troop-contributing countries regarding the mission's mandate. As a result, the DRC has increasingly turned to external actors, including the United States and Qatar, for mediation and support, highlighting the limitations of regional approaches and raising critical questions about the future of regional integration and peacebuilding in Africa.

This paper critically examines the roles of the EAC and SADC either in individually or in joint cooperation, in addressing the ongoing conflict in the DRC, moving beyond their conventional mandates as regional security arrangements. It interrogates the extent to which these organisations have succeeded or struggled in mediating disputes and fostering sustainable peace in the face of a complex polycrisis. Central to this inquiry is the question: In light of the protracted and complex DRC conflict, how can regional integration be successfully fostered and maintained? Through a detailed analysis of recent initiatives, joint operations, and diplomatic efforts, this study argues that traditional, economically focused approaches to integration are insufficient in the context of such multifaceted instability and that a more robust, security-conscious, and politically integrated framework is necessary to effectively address the challenges posed by regional conflicts, terrorism, and economic disparities.

This study is significant; this is because by analysing recent initiatives, individual and joint military operations, and diplomatic strategies, this article can contribute to a more profound understanding of the strengths and limitations of regional organisations in conflict-affected settings. It offers critical insights into the evolving nature of regionalism in Africa, the interplay between

¹ The Eastern DRC is estimated to have about 142 local armed groups with presence in the North and South Kivu provinces as well as Ituri Province. There are also foreign armed groups that include FDLR, Red Tabara, LRA and ADF which are known to plan terrorism and destabilization activities against a number of EAC Partner States. (Interview with DRC Government official, 15.6.2025, Arusha, Tanzania)

security and development, and the prerequisites for achieving lasting peace in the DRC and beyond. The findings are intended to inform policymakers, scholars, and practitioners seeking to enhance the effectiveness of regional mechanisms in addressing complex, transnational challenges.

The article begins by introducing the concept of polycrisis in the DRC, highlighting its complexity and regional implications. This section also identifies the central role of EAC and SADC in peacebuilding efforts. The second section explains the dual theoretical lenses guiding the study: Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which emphasizes interdependent security dynamics among proximate states, and Neofunctionalism, which explains how crises and integration in one sector can catalyze broader regional cooperation. The discussion also addresses the limitations of these theories in the context of protracted, multifaceted crises like that of the DRC. The third section outlines the materials and methods employed throughout the research. Section four defines the concept of polycrisis and distinguishes it from multicrisis, emphasizing the mutually reinforcing nature of crises in the DRC. Regionalism and conflict are also clarified in this section. The fifth section provides a brief historical context of the DRC conflict, tracing the origins and drivers of instability and illustrating how overlapping security, humanitarian, and economic crises create a multifaceted polycrisis. Section six examines the roles of SADC and EAC in addressing the DRC polycrisis, providing a thorough analysis of their historical and recent peacebuilding strategies—both political and military—their effectiveness, limitations, and the overlaps in mandate and methodology. Section seven delves into attempts at collaboration between the EAC, SADC, and the AU, as well as the involvement of external actors such as Qatar and the United States in peace processes. Section eight offers a detailed analysis and discussion of the successes and shortcomings of regional interventions, identifying institutional, operational, and political barriers. Lessons learned drawing from the DRC experiences and ways to strengthen regional cooperation, coordination, and capacity are also suggested. The concluding section synthesizes the findings and offers forward-looking perspectives on the future of regional peacebuilding and integration in the context of complex crises.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon two complementary theoretical perspectives: Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and neofunctionalism. RSCT, developed by Buzan (1991) and further refined by Buzan and Wæver, posits that groups of geographically proximate states exhibit interdependent security dynamics, with threats and vulnerabilities that are closely linked and best understood at the regional level. RSCT emphasizes the necessity of regional organizations as primary actors in managing and mitigating security threats that transcend national borders. In the context of the DRC, RSCT highlights how the security and stability of the country are inseparable from those of its neighbors, making collective responses by organizations like SADC and EAC not only logical but necessary.

Neofunctionalism, as articulated by Haas (1958, 1964) and Schmitter (1969), emphasises the role of supranational institutions and the process of “spillover,” whereby integration in one sector (e.g., economics) leads to further integration in others (e.g., political, security). Neofunctionalism recognises the agency of multiple actors—including states, regional bodies, and civil society—in driving integration and posits that crises and challenges can catalyse deeper cooperation.

However, the DRC’s polycrisis challenges the assumptions of both theories. While RSCT explains the imperative for regional action, it does not guarantee effectiveness, particularly when member states have divergent interests or lack capacity. Similarly, neofunctionalism logic is strained in contexts where chronic insecurity undermines the trust and stability necessary for economic and political integration. The DRC’s experience suggests that integration in crisis-prone regions may be non-linear, contested, and subject to reversal, requiring adaptive strategies and a willingness to address political and security fundamentals alongside economic goals (De Prabil et al., 2025). By integrating these frameworks, this study situates EAC and SADC interventions within both the structural imperatives of regional security and the contingent, actor-driven dynamics of regional integration under crisis conditions.

3. Material and Methods

This research employs a qualitative, multi-method approach to capture the complexity of regional interventions in the DRC. Two primary data collection strategies were used: First, semi-structured interviews: A total of 24 in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including senior government officials from the DRC, representatives from member states involved in EAC

and SADC initiatives, officials from the two regional organizations, and experts from NGOs and think tanks. Interviewees were selected for their direct involvement or expertise in regional peacebuilding and conflict management. Interviews took place both in person and via video conferencing, accommodating participants' locations and schedules. Questions focused on the design, implementation, challenges, and perceived impacts of regional initiatives in the DRC.

Second, document analysis: The study systematically reviewed a wide range of primary documents—official communiqués, peace agreements, summit declarations, mission mandates, resolutions, and reports from regional organizations and the United Nations—as well as secondary sources such as academic articles, policy briefs, and media coverage. This provided a comprehensive view of decision-making processes, policy shifts, and outcomes associated with EAC and SADC involvement.

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurrent patterns, themes, and contradictions across interviews and documents. Coding focused on intervention strategies, coordination mechanisms, operational results, and perceived obstacles. Additionally, process tracing was applied to reconstruct the sequence of key events and decisions, linking them to broader theoretical frameworks and regional dynamics.

Limitations: The qualitative approach provided rich, context-sensitive insights, but the sample size and the perspectives represented limit the study's findings. The reliance on elite interviews may underrepresent grassroots or community-level experiences. Furthermore, the rapidly evolving situation in the DRC means that some developments may have occurred after data collection.

4. Understanding Polycrisis, Regionalism, and Conflict

The concept of polycrisis has gained attention in recent academic and policy discourse, describing situations where multiple, diverse crises interact in complex, reinforcing ways, creating outcomes that are more unpredictable and severe than the sum of their parts (Tooze, 2022; UNDP, 2022; Donges, 2024; Helleiner, 2025). Polycrisis is distinguished from “multicrisis” by the deeply intertwined nature of the problems—it is not the mere coexistence of challenges but their mutual amplification through feedback loops and systemic interdependencies (Morin, 1993; Ang, 2024; Albert, 2024; Helleiner, 2025).

In the case of the DRC, polycrisis manifests as a convergence of armed conflict, state fragility, humanitarian breakdown, environmental degradation, and economic volatility. Each crisis element compounds the others: Armed conflict perpetuates displacement, undermines agricultural activities, and erodes state legitimacy. Humanitarian emergencies—including mass displacement, food insecurity, and disease outbreaks—are worsened by insecurity and weak governance, while they also strain neighboring states, fostering regional tensions. Resource exploitation and illicit trade feed into the political economy of violence, incentivising local and transnational actors to perpetuate instability for profit (Stearns, 2021; OCHA, 2025).

These diverse crises are not isolated events. For example, the ongoing conflicts in the DRC drive population displacements, which in turn create humanitarian emergencies and disrupt regional markets; state weakness allows armed groups to thrive, further fueling violence and undermining governance. The closure of key infrastructure, such as airports and supply routes, constrains humanitarian access and impedes economic life, further deepening the crisis (OCHA, 2025; UNDP, 2022). Importantly, the DRC's polycrisis is not contained within its borders. The cross-border movement of refugees, the spread of armed groups, illicit flows of minerals, and the involvement of neighbouring states illustrate how local crises are regionalized, with spillover effects that destabilize the Great Lakes and wider Central and Eastern Africa (AU, 2025a; WEF, 2023).

5. Regionalism as a Response to Polycrisis

Regionalism refers to the processes and structures through which states and non-state actors within a defined geographic area pursue common goals, manage shared problems, and create institutions for cooperation (Mattli, 1999; Fawcett, 2017). In Africa, regionalism has historically been seen as a means to promote not only economic integration but also peace, stability, and collective self-reliance—captured in the African Union's principle of “African solutions to African problems” (Aning & Atuobi, 2009; Coleman, 2011).

The proliferation of Regional Economic Communities (RECs), such as SADC and EAC, reflects the continent's strategy of building "building blocks" toward continental integration. These organisations are mandated not only to foster economic cooperation but also to address cross-border security threats, mediate conflicts, and coordinate humanitarian responses (Hettne, 2008; Söderbaum & Hettne, 2010).

According to the Regional Security Complex Theory, regions like Central and East Africa are characterized by closely linked security dynamics, where the national security of states cannot be understood in isolation (Buzan, 1991). Cross-border conflicts, such as those in the DRC, pose regional threats and call for regional interventions. However, polycrisis challenges the traditional logic of regionalism: overlapping crises and overlapping institutions. The DRC's membership in multiple regional organisations (EAC, SADC, ECCAS, COMESA, and ICGLR) leads to institutional complexity and sometimes rivalry, hindering coherent responses and diluting accountability.

Limits of Economic-Driven Regionalism: In conditions of acute insecurity and state fragility, the market-based, incremental models of integration envisioned by neofunctionalism are often unworkable. Crises disrupt formal trade, render borders porous to illicit flows, and make economic harmonization difficult to sustain.

Need for Security-First Integration: The DRC case demonstrates that, in contexts of polycrisis, regionalism must prioritize security, governance, and state-building alongside economic objectives. Peace and trust are prerequisites for deeper integration. This is because regional and sub-regional organisations have unique opportunities and power to handle crises in their own areas (UN, 2011, 2013) - power and influence to deal with crises in their own areas (UN, 2011, 2013). A synopsis of the DRC conflict's historical background is given in the subsequent section.

6. Origins and Development of the DRC Conflict

There is a consensus among the scholars that the foundations of conflict in the DRC were laid during the colonial period under Belgian rule from 1885 to 1960 (Kisangani, 2012; Kan, 2019; Stearns, 2021). The extractive colonial administration prioritized resource exploitation over state-building, leaving behind weak governance structures, artificial borders, and deep social divisions. Upon gaining independence in 1960, the new Congolese state—then known as the Republic of the Congo—was ill-prepared for self-governance. The subsequent Congo Crisis (1960-1965) witnessed secessionist movements (notably Katanga), foreign interventions, and internal power struggles, resulting in chronic instability.

The rise of Mobutu Sese Seko in 1965 ushered in over three decades of authoritarian rule, marked by kleptocracy, patronage networks, and repression. While Mobutu maintained a fragile impression of unity, his regime hollowed out state institutions and fostered deep corruption, exacerbating ethnic and regional tensions. By the time Mobutu was overthrown in 1997, the DRC (then known as Zaire) was characterized by institutional decay, economic collapse, and widespread marginalization (Barrera, 2015; Berwouts, 2017; Varin and Abubakar, 2017; Sweet, 2019; Kan, 2019; Stearns 2021).

The current phase of conflict can be traced to the 1994 Rwandan genocide and its aftermath. The genocide led to a massive influx of refugees, including armed Hutu militias (Interahamwe and ex-FAR), into eastern Zaire. This influx destabilised the region, inflamed local ethnic rivalries, and created humanitarian crises (Stearns, 2021; UN, 2024). The presence of hostile armed groups along the Rwandan border prompted Rwanda and Uganda to intervene militarily, supporting the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila.

The First Congo War (1996-1997) resulted in the overthrow of Mobutu and the installation of Kabila as president. However, the alliance among regional actors soon fractured. The Second Congo War (1998-2003), often dubbed 'Africa's World War,' involved as many as nine African countries and numerous rebel groups. Key drivers included competition over the DRC's vast mineral wealth, unresolved ethnic tensions, and the interests of neighbouring states seeking to secure their borders or exploit resources. The war led to immense human suffering: millions died from violence, disease, and displacement (Weiss, 2000; Berwouts, 2017).

While peace agreements such as the Lusaka Ceasefire (1999), Sun City (2002), and Pretoria Accords (2002) formally ended large-scale interstate warfare, they failed to resolve underlying grievances. Numerous armed groups, often supported by regional actors, continued to vie for control, particularly in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu and Ituri. The proliferation of militias—motivated by local, national, and transnational interests—has made the landscape exceedingly complex (Rufanges & Royo, 2016; ACCORD, 2016; AU, 2025c).

Control over lucrative minerals such as coltan, gold, tin, and diamonds has been a central driver of conflict. Armed groups—both domestic and foreign-backed—have financed their operations through illegal mining and taxation, perpetuating cycles of violence and undermining state authority. Simultaneously, weak governance, corruption, and limited provision of public goods have fuelled popular grievances and eroded trust in state institutions (Stearns, 2021).

Ethnic rivalries and land disputes, often manipulated by political elites, have contributed to recurring outbreaks of violence. Competition over land and resources has also led to intercommunal tensions, further complicating peace efforts. The humanitarian consequences have been dire, with millions displaced and widespread reports of sexual and gender-based violence (UN, 2024; AU, 2025d).

7. Recent Developments

Despite the official end of the Congo Wars, instability has persisted, particularly with the resurgence of groups such as the March 23 Movement (M23), Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The withdrawal of MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping mission, in 2023, left a security vacuum that was not fully addressed by subsequent regional interventions (e.g., EACRF, SAMIDRC). The continued presence of armed actors, displacement, and humanitarian emergencies highlight the ongoing nature of the crisis (Sabala & Muhindo, 2024; OCHA, 2025).

Numerous literature reviews establish that the DRC's conflict is not a singular crisis but a "polycrisis" encompassing intertwined issues of weak statehood, resource competition, regional intervention, and humanitarian catastrophe (Tricontinental, 2024; AU, 2025a; OCHA, 2025). Multiple peace processes, both national and international, have yet to produce durable solutions. The persistent instability underscores the urgent need for multidimensional, coordinated approaches—both within the DRC and at the regional and international levels.

Over the past few decades, regional states, including Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and Angola, have played dual roles as both peace brokers and parties to the conflict. Their involvement stems from security concerns, refugee flows, and economic interests in the DRC's natural resources. The porous borders and shifting alliances have internationalized the conflict, complicating regional diplomacy and peacebuilding initiatives.

8. SADC's Role in DRC Conflict Settlement

The DRC is a member of several RECs, including SADC, but SADC's interventions have been particularly significant, playing a complex role in efforts to achieve peace and stability in the DRC. The nature and impact of SADC's interventions have evolved over time, reflecting both internal dynamics within the organisation and the shifting realities of conflict in the DRC and the region.

SADC was established with the primary objective of promoting economic integration and development in Southern Africa, but its mandate has gradually expanded to encompass peace and security. The SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation was created in June 1996 to address regional security threats and manage conflicts (SADC, 2003). The DRC, as a member of SADC and a country with strategic importance in Central and Southern Africa, has been a focal point for SADC's security agenda.

SADC's first major involvement in the DRC conflict dates back to 1998, with military and diplomatic support for Laurent-Désiré Kabila. When his government was threatened by a rebellion supported by Rwanda and Uganda, he appealed to SADC for assistance. In response, Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe—acting under the SADC framework—deployed troops in support of Kabila under Operation Sovereign Legitimacy (OSLEG). This intervention was justified by SADC as a collective security measure under its protocols for mutual defense and regional solidarity (Reliefweb, 1998; Ngoma, 2004). While some SADC states such as South Africa and Botswana advocated for mediation and diplomatic solution, other such as Angola and Zimbabwe opted for military intervention and sent troops in support of Laurent Kabila (Reliefweb, 1998). Despite these divisions, the military intervention was instrumental in preventing the rapid collapse of the Congolese government and contributed to the signing of the Lusaka

Ceasefire Agreement in 1999, and eventually to peace agreements with Rwanda and Uganda (Wilén, 2012; ACCORD, 2016).² Subsequent mediation led to the withdrawal of foreign troops and the establishment of transitional governance arrangements (ACCORD, 2016). These efforts culminated in the 2006 elections, the first democratic polls in decades, which were seen as a significant milestone for the DRC's political stabilisation (ACCORD, 2016).

9. The Force Intervention Brigade and Peacekeeping Innovation

In response to the persistent threat posed by armed groups in eastern DRC, SADC contributed to the creation of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in 2013 (UNSC, 2013c). The FIB, composed of troops from Malawi, South Africa, and Tanzania, was the first UN peacekeeping force with an explicit offensive mandate to neutralise armed groups, especially M23 and the FDLR. The FIB operated as part of the larger MONUSCO mission, under the auspices of both the UN and SADC (UNSC, 2013c; Sheeran and Case, 2014).

The FIB achieved some initial successes, such as the defeat of M23 in 2013, which temporarily improved security in North Kivu and allowed for the return of displaced persons (Fabricius, 2020). However, the persistence of other groups such as FARDC, ADF, and FNL; the re-emergence of M23, and the inability to fully disarm and dismantle all militias, led to renewed conflict after its withdrawal. Persistent insecurity and rebel resurgence resulted in renewed humanitarian crises (Giblin, 2024).

10. The SAMIDRC Mission (2023-2025) and Recent Setbacks

As insecurity continued to escalate, particularly after the DRC government requested the withdrawal of MONUSCO, SADC deployed the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC) in December 2023 (SADC, 2024; Bauma, 2024; Nantulya, 2024). The SAMIDRC was tasked with supporting the Congolese army in joint operations against armed groups, notably M23, and stabilizing territories in eastern DRC.

However, SAMIDRC faced numerous operational challenges. The Congolese army was under-resourced and lacked cohesion, while SADC member states struggled to sustain funding and logistical support. There were casualties among SADC troops, and the mission was unable to reverse M23 territorial gains. Political will among SADC members was uneven, with some reluctant to commit resources to a perceived intractable conflict that did not directly threaten their national interests (Handy, 2025a). By March 2025, SADC announced the gradual withdrawal of SAMIDRC, acknowledging the mission's limited impact and the deteriorating security environment (ICG, 2019; Handy, 2025a; UNSC, 2025).

Nevertheless, SADC's interventions in the DRC have demonstrated both the willingness and the constraints of regional security arrangements, and its role remains mixed, with critiques of ineffectiveness and praise for advancing regional security, political dialogues, and the transition process (AU, 2020; Handy, 2025a). Some view the SADC intervention as ineffectual or even exacerbating the conflict (ICG, 2019). Internal divisions and divergent national interests have undermined the coherence and effectiveness of SADC's responses. Overlapping mandates with other regional organisations (EAC, ECCAS, ICGLR) have led to institutional fragmentation and duplication of efforts.

Yet, SADC's role must be understood within the broader context of regional and international engagement in the DRC. The presence of multiple regional organisations, as well as global actors such as the UN and, more recently, Qatar and the United States, has created a crowded peacebuilding environment. Coordination challenges, competing interests, and inconsistent political will have limited the effectiveness of regional efforts.

Despite these challenges, SADC remains an essential actor in any future settlement, given its historical ties, strategic interests, and the DRC's membership in the bloc. Nevertheless, persistent insecurity, operational difficulties, and institutional fragmentation have limited its ability to deliver lasting peace. The DRC case illustrates both the promise and the limitations of regionalism in African security and highlights the need for more integrated, long-term, and multidimensional strategies for conflict prevention and settlement. The lessons from SADC's involvement underscore the need for more holistic, well-resourced, and politically unified approaches to conflict settlement in the DRC and similar complex crises.

² Similar observation from Interviews with SADC official via video conferencing technology, 14.06.2025.

11. EAC's Intervention in the DRC Polycrisis

The East African Community (EAC) has emerged as a key regional actor in efforts to resolve the ongoing conflict and polycrisis in the DRC. The EAC's engagement began in 2022, following the DRC's accession to the bloc, providing new opportunities as well as challenges for regional peacebuilding (EAC, 2022a; EAC, 2022b; EAC, 2022c). Persistent instability in the eastern DRC—marked by cross-border rebel activity, illicit arms flows, and refugee movements—posed direct security threats to EAC member states such as Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. In addition, the planned withdrawal of the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission left a security vacuum that regional organisations felt compelled to fill. Therefore, EAC leadership sought to assert its relevance and capacity as a regional peace and security actor, in line with continental trends toward “African solutions to African problems.”

Therefore, in 2022, the EAC launched the Nairobi process sought to address the conflict through a dual-track approach comprising both political dialogue and military measures under the East African Community Regional Forces (EACRF) (EAC, 2022b; UNSC, 2025). Political Track: Led by former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta as EAC's appointed mediator, the process aimed to facilitate negotiations between the DRC government, local communities, and various armed groups operating in eastern DRC. The process emphasized inclusivity, regional leadership, and “ownership” by Congolese stakeholders. Regular dialogue forums in Nairobi provided a platform for airing grievances, negotiating ceasefires, and encouraging voluntary disarmament (EAC, 2022b).

Faced with intensifying violence, particularly from the M23 rebellion, the DRC government invited the EAC to deploy a regional military force, the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), in November 2022 (EAC, 2022d). The EACRF was deployed while MONUSCO was there, but with rising violence, the DRC government invited the EAC to deploy a regional military force, EACRF.³ The EACRF was tasked with supporting the Congolese army to restore peace, protect civilians, secure liberated areas, and neutralise armed groups. Troops were contributed by Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, and South Sudan, with logistical and political support from other EAC states. After several months of deployment, the EACRF struggled to achieve decisive results. Disagreements over the rules of engagement; lack of trust between the DRC and certain EAC partner states (particularly Rwanda and Uganda); funding; and the force's political mandate led the DRC government to decline renewal of the EACRF's mandate, prompting its withdrawal in December 2023 (The Conversation, 2023).⁴

After the withdrawal of EACRF, the Congolese government again turned to SADC, requesting military assistance to address rebellion by M23 and other rebel groups. Consequently, as mentioned above the SADC Mission in DRC (SAMIDRC) was redeployed in December 2023, and withdrew in April 2025. Continuous change in regional forces, fuelled by ongoing and intensifying conflict in eastern provinces, are demonstrated by the SAMIDRC forces' second mission there. Additionally, the failure of the second mission contributed to the feeling of a loss of momentum for peace.⁵ The withdrawal highlights difficulties by regional security arrangements in dealing with long-running conflicts on their own. In addition, As EAC and SADC struggled to resolve the conflict, the DRC government increasingly turned to external mediators, including Qatar and the United States, seeking more effective diplomatic and security guarantees (Aljazeera, 2025a, b).

The EAC's intervention in the DRC polycrisis offers several lessons. Firstly, are the limits of regional approaches. While regional organisations are well-placed to understand local dynamics, their effectiveness is limited by internal divisions, resource constraints, and the complexity of the conflicts they seek to address.⁶ Secondly, The EAC needs to invest in stronger conflict resolution mechanisms, clearer mandates for interventions, and more robust funding arrangements to play a more effective role in regional security. Thirdly, cooperation and competition with other regional actors. EAC's intervention did not occur in isolation. The security environment in the Great Lakes region is characterised by the involvement of multiple regional organisations—including SADC, ECCAS, and the ICGLR—as well as the AU and the UN.

³ Interview with Senior Congolese Government officials on 16.6.2025, EAC Headquarters, Arusha, Tanzania

⁴ Interview with Senior Congolese Government officials on 16.6.2025, EAC Headquarters, Arusha, Tanzania

⁵ Interview with senior Congolese government officials, via video conferencing meeting. 12.7.2025.

⁶ Interview with the EAC Senior official and senior Congolese government officials, via video conferencing meeting. 12.7.2025.

However, EAC's involvement in the DRC represents a significant evolution in the organisation's mandate and regional security architecture. The experience demonstrates both the potential and the pitfalls of regional responses to complex crises. Moving forward, the EAC must address internal divisions, build trust among member states, and adopt a multidimensional approach if it is to contribute meaningfully to peace and stability in the DRC and the wider Great Lakes region.

12. EAC-SADC Cooperation and AU Partnership

As the crisis in the DRC deepened and defied resolution by individual regional organisations, both the EAC and SADC have recognised that the DRC's persistent polycrisis—marked by armed conflict, humanitarian disaster, and state fragility—cannot be effectively managed by any single bloc. Furthermore, the DRC's geography, straddling eastern, central, and southern Africa, as well as its membership in both the EAC and SADC, means that instability within its borders rapidly becomes a regional issue, impacting trade, migration, security, and political relations across borders. These experiences highlighted the limitations of fragmented efforts and the need for harmonised, mutually reinforcing strategies.

Recognising these challenges, leaders from both organisations have decided to merge their peace initiatives and approached in 2025, seeking improved coordination and approached (EAC-SADC, 2025b). This was formalised by a series of high-level summits, most notably the joint EAC-SADC Summit in Dar es Salaam in February 2025. These meetings produced communiqués pledging to merge peace initiatives, streamline military operations, and jointly develop comprehensive approaches to both immediate security threats and long-term governance and development issues (EAC-SADC, 2025a, c).

The cooperation took several forms. Firstly, the Peace Processes, which is the Nairobi Process (led by the EAC and focused on dialogue and mediation), and the Luanda Process (facilitated by Angola and supported by SADC) were merged to avoid duplication and to present a unified diplomatic front, facilitating negotiations between the DRC government, rebel groups, and regional stakeholders. Secondly, coordinated military deployments. There was agreement to better coordinate the deployment and activities of military missions—EACRF and SAMIDRC—to maximize resource efficiency and avoid conflicting mandates or troop deployments in the same theatre. Thirdly, policy harmonisation. Efforts were made to synchronize political messaging, policy objectives, and public communications to prevent mixed signals to conflict parties, donors, and the international community. However, despite a joint summit formalising cooperation, the polycrisis has continued to outstrip regional security frameworks. This contributed by persistent armed group activity, inconsistent political will, and confusion over divergent strategies.

13. Partnership with the African Union

Recognising the transregional and even continental nature of the DRC's challenges, the African Union (AU) was brought in to coordinate regional and international efforts. In August 2025, EAC and SADC leaders agreed to subsume their joint processes under an AU-led framework (EAC-SADC, 2025d). This move was motivated by several factors. First, the AU's involvement provided greater political legitimacy and neutrality, helping to overcome suspicions of bias or self-interest that sometimes-plagued subregional actors. Secondly, as the umbrella continental body, the AU could mobilize broader diplomatic support and funding, and coordinate with the United Nations, donor states, and other international organizations. Thirdly, the AU can provide a set of shared principles—such as the primacy of African solutions, respect for sovereignty, and the responsibility to protect—which helped align objectives and methodologies across regions. However, ongoing violence and the parallel involvement of international actors (e.g., Qatar, the United States) in brokering ceasefires and peace agreements (EAC-SADC, 2025d), sometimes introduced competing frameworks and priorities. This situation highlights the insufficiency of regional and continental bodies alone in resolving the DRC conflict.

Nevertheless, the EAC-SADC-AU partnership represents a recognition that “networked regionalism”—where multiple RECs and the AU align their capacities and strategies—is essential for addressing Africa's most complex security crises (EAC-SADC, 2025d). The DRC experience demonstrates that regional organisations must prioritise joint planning, and that sustained commitment at the highest political levels is vital for overcoming institutional inertia and conflicting interests. Additionally, continental leadership must be strengthened, as the AU's role as a convener, norm-setter, and coordinator is indispensable for transcending subregional rivalries and ensuring continent-wide legitimacy.

In sum, the EAC-SADC cooperation and AU partnership mark an important evolution in African regional security governance. While notable challenges remain, this model of collaborative engagement offers a more promising path for tackling the deeply rooted and interconnected crises in the DRC-providing lessons for regional and continental responses to complex emergencies elsewhere in Africa.

14. Findings and Discussion of the EAC-SADC's Role in the DRC Polycrisis

EAC and SADC interventions have demonstrated the challenges posed by polycrisis conditions. The study finds that while polycrisis can drive regional cooperation (De Prabil et al, 2025), it also creates profound obstacles. Mistrust among member states, humanitarian burdens, and competing mandates undermine integration. The DRC's overlapping membership in multiple RECs leads to institutional incoherence and weakens intervention effectiveness. However, most of findings are organised around the main themes that emerged from interviews, document review, and theoretical analysis.

14.1 From Theoretical perspective and practical implication

From a theoretical perspective, the DRC case challenges the sufficiency of neofunctionalism and traditional regional security complex theories, which posit that crises can drive progressive regional integration and cooperation. While some cooperation has been catalysed, deep-seated mistrust, historical grievances, and power asymmetries continue to obstruct the realisation of a genuinely collective security and integration agenda.

Practically, the DRC experience highlights the urgent need to reimagine African regionalism. Economic integration and traditional peacekeeping are necessary, but not sufficient. In this regard, De Prabil and others (2025) argue that effective regionalism in a polycrisis context requires multidimensional approaches-integrating governance reforms, inclusive development, political dialogue, and adaptive security strategies. This requires cross-sectoral and cross-pillar coordination to ensure that policies and initiatives are aligned and mutually reinforcing (De, Prabil et al, 2025). Additionally, strengthened institutional frameworks, sustainable funding mechanisms, and genuine political will among member states are essential for regional organisations to fulfill their mandates and responsibilities.

14.2 The Promise and Pitfalls on Regional Responses

The involvement of EAC and SADC in the DRC reflects the growing prominence of African-led regionalism in conflict resolution. Both organisations have demonstrated a willingness to deploy political, military, and humanitarian resources in pursuit of regional stability. Their engagement aligns with theories of regional security complexes and neofunctionalism, which posit that regional crises can catalyse cooperation and integration among neighboring states. However, evidence from the DRC points to persistent limitations. Regional interventions were often reactive and fragmented, with EAC and SADC acting separately or even competitively, and adopted different strategies, rather than as a unified front. The EAC's interventionist model contrasts with SADC's consensus-driven approach focusing on institutional capacity. Although merger efforts are underway, competing interests and external involvement complicate peacebuilding. In addition, both blocs contributed to temporary ceasefires and facilitated some dialogue, their efforts were undermined by divergent interests, operational weaknesses, and a lack of sustained political will.

14.3 Divergent Approaches and Shared Obstacles

The EAC and SADC adopted distinct approaches to the DRC crisis, shaped by their institutional cultures and member state priorities. While EAC prioritised an integrated political-military model, launching both the Nairobi Process (political dialogue) and the EACRF (military intervention). However, the presence of EAC member states accused of supporting rebel groups, as well as inconsistent commitment to military engagement, undermined both trust and operational effectiveness. SADC emphasised a more traditional security response-deploying peacekeeping and stabilisation missions (e.g., SAMIDRC, FIB)-and supporting the Congolese government's authority. Yet, operational challenges, resource constraints, and hesitancy among some members to invest in a costly, protracted conflict limited success.

14.4 Progress And Gaps on Coordination and Cooperation

Improved coordination between the EAC, SADC, and the AU represents a positive shift. Joint summits, merged peace initiatives (Nairobi and Luanda Processes), and AU leadership have enhanced strategic alignment, resource allocation, and policy messaging. Despite this progress, coordination remains hampered by: Overlapping mandates and institutional rivalries; Competing national interests and unresolved historical grievances; External actors introducing parallel peace processes (e.g., Qatar, US), sometimes sidelining regional bodies (Aljazeera 2025a, b). In addition to that, the lack of a unified, continent-wide framework has at times enabled conflict actors to manipulate divisions and delay comprehensive settlement.

14.5 The Polycrisis Effect: Complicating Integration and Cooperation

This paper found that the DRC's polycrisis has had a profound impact on regional integration efforts including:

1. **Mistrust and Security Dilemmas:** The proliferation of cross-border armed groups and persistent suspicions—such as DRC's distrust of Rwanda and Uganda—have undermined confidence-building and burden-sharing within regional organisations.
2. **Humanitarian and Social Strain:** Massive displacement, refugee flows, and resource pressures have strained relations between host and origin countries, stoking xenophobia and social tensions that undermine integration goals.
3. **Economic and Institutional Erosion:** Armed conflict disrupts trade routes, erodes state authority, and incentivises informal and illicit economies, hindering formal economic integration and weakening regional institutions. The result is a vicious cycle: instability impedes integration, and weak integration frameworks struggle to address instability.

14.6 External Mediation and Its Implications

The DRC government's turn to external mediators (Qatar, United States) for brokering ceasefires and peace agreements underscores both the limitations and perceived inadequacy of regional frameworks (Aljazeera 2025b). While international involvement can bring additional resources and leverage, it also risks overshadowing regional ownership and complicating diplomatic coherence. Interviews revealed that Congolese officials saw external actors as offering more robust diplomatic pressure, financial support, and enforcement capacity than regional bodies alone.⁷ However, this reliance comes with trade-offs, including the potential dilution of "African solutions to African problems" and the risk of external agendas dominating peace processes.

15. Lessons Learned and Implications for Regionalism: Insights from the DRC Polycrisis

The ongoing polycrisis in the DRC offers a wealth of lessons for the practice and future of regionalism in Africa and beyond. While regional organisations have played an indispensable role in addressing complex crises, their experience in the DRC demonstrates that regionalism alone is not sufficient. Effective regional mechanisms require more than just formal structures; they must be supported by adequate resources, political unity, clear mandates, and, critically, the backing of local populations. Without these foundational elements, regional efforts risk being ineffective or even counterproductive.

Another important lesson is that regional integration must be multidimensional. Sustainable peace and stability are unattainable through isolated efforts in either the economic, political, or security spheres. Instead, these dimensions are deeply interdependent and must advance together. Good governance, economic development, and robust security measures must be pursued simultaneously for regional initiatives to yield lasting results.

Building trust and legitimacy emerges as a particularly critical factor. For regional interventions to succeed, they must be perceived by local communities as impartial and genuinely inclusive. If regional organizations are seen as biased or manipulated by external actors, their legitimacy is undermined, which can derail peacebuilding efforts and breed further mistrust.

Moreover, the experience in the DRC underscores the necessity for adaptive and flexible responses. Polycrisis environments are dynamic and often unpredictable. Regional bodies must be capable of learning from setbacks, reassessing their strategies, and adjusting their approaches as conditions evolve on the ground. Rigidity and adherence to inflexible plans can limit effectiveness and even exacerbate existing challenges.

⁷ Interview with Congolese government official, 8 June 2025, EAC, Arusha, Tanzania.

Furthermore, the DRC case highlights the importance of synergy between regional and international actors. Rather than competing for influence, regional and international partners should work collaboratively, aligning their efforts with the priorities and ownership of the affected countries and regions. This cooperation enhances the legitimacy and impact of interventions, ensuring that external support complements rather than undermines local initiatives.

Finally, the DRC polycrisis illustrates that successful regionalism demands more than structural arrangements. It requires multidimensional integration, trust-building, adaptive strategies, and genuine partnership with international actors, all anchored in the needs and aspirations of local populations. These lessons are crucial for informing future regional responses to complex crises across the continent.

Even though EAC and SADC have made important contributions, their ability to foster sustainable peace is hindered ongoing insecurity and humanitarian crisis, which diverts significant political and financial resources away from long-term peace initiatives. Additionally, overlapping mandates and poor coordination among regional bodies often result in fragmented efforts and duplication of activities. Institutional weaknesses, inadequate funding, and limited enforcement mechanisms further undermine the effectiveness of these organisations. Social tensions, fuelled by mass displacement and competition over resources, exacerbate instability, while illicit economies erode formal integration and regional stability.

To address these challenges, a shift is needed from traditional, economically-driven models to integrated frameworks that are politically robust and security-conscious. Regional security arrangements must be strengthened, ensuring that collective forces are legitimate, well-resourced, and accountable. Enhancing institutional capacity and diversifying funding sources is essential to reduce dependency on external donors and build local ownership. Inclusive political dialogue should be promoted, with a focus on addressing the root causes of instability-particularly issues of governance and resource management. Finally, support from external partners must be better aligned with regional priorities to maximize impact and foster sustainable peace in the DRC.

16. Conclusion

This study has critically examined the roles of the EAC and SADC in peacebuilding efforts in the DRC, highlighting both their commitment and their limitations. Despite notable diplomatic, military, and humanitarian initiatives, their effectiveness has been hampered by divisions among member states, overlapping mandates, resource constraints, and weak political cohesion. The DRC's polycrisis, marked by intertwined security, governance, and socio-economic challenges, demonstrates the complexity of African conflicts and the inadequacy of conventional, sectoral responses.

A multidimensional, regionally owned strategy-encompassing governance reform, inclusive development, and strong cross-border cooperation-is essential. The analysis exposes the limitations of traditional regional integration theories when confronted with ongoing instability and state fragility, and emphasises the need for adaptive, coordinated, and inclusive approaches. Regional organisations must be empowered with clear mandates, reliable resources, and strong partnerships with the AU and UN.

Achieving sustainable peace and integration in the DRC, and in similar contexts, requires a shift from reactive, fragmented interventions to proactive, holistic, and politically grounded strategies. Future policy should focus on strengthening institutional capacity, building trust, and institutionalising learning and adaptation. Further research is needed on innovative governance models and the comparative effectiveness of regional responses.

References

- ACCORD. (2016). SADC interventions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes. <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/sadc-interventions-democratic-republic-congo/>
- Albert, M. J. (2024). Albert, M. (2024). The dynamics of polycrisis: Systemic risks and feedback loops. *Journal of Crisis Studies*, 12(1), 45-61.
- Aljazeera. (2025a). M23-DR Congo peace talks in Doha stalled: What next? Aljazeera New, August 19. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/19/m23-dr-congo-peace-talks-in-doha-stalled-what-next>
- Aljazeera. (2015c). DRC calls for an end to UN peacekeeping mission. Aljazeera News, March 19. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/03/drc-calls-peacekeeping-mission-150319200034331.html>
- Aljazeera. (2025b, July 19). DR Congo, M23 rebels sign deal in Qatar to end fighting in eastern Congo. Aljazeera News, July 19, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/19/dr-congo-m23-rebels-sign-deal-qatar>
- Ang, Y. Y. (2024). Doing development in the polycrisis. UNDP. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/new-economic-development-paradigm-needed-for-climate-change-inequality-pandemics-by-yuen-yuen-ang-2024-11>
- Aning, K., & Atuobi, S. (2009). Responsibility to protect in Africa: An analysis of the African Union's peace and security architecture. *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 1(1), 90-113.
- AU. (2025a). Communiqué of the 1261st meeting of the Peace and Security Council, held on 14 February 2025 at the level of Heads of State and Government, on the situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). February 18. <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-of-the-1261st-meeting-of-the-peace-and-security-council-held-on-14-february-2025-at-the-level-of-heads-of-state-and-government-on-the-situation-in-eastern-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-drc>
- AU. (2025b). Press release: Chairperson of the African Union Commission welcomes the Doha meeting between the leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. March 19. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20250319/chairperson-african-union-commission-welcomes-doha-meeting-between-leaders>
- AU. (2025c). Communiqué on the situation in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). February 14, <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/1261.2.comm-en.pdf>
- AU. (2025d, January 28). Communiqué adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 1256th Emergency Ministerial Meeting held on 28 January 2025 on the recent developments in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/1256.comm-en.pdf>
- AU. (2024). Communiqué of the 1203rd meeting of the PSC held on 4 March 2024, on consideration of the situation in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the deployment of the Southern African Development Community Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC). March 9, <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-1203rd-meeting-of-the-psc>
- Bauma, K. (2024). SAMIDRC: SADC's mission in the DRC. *African Security Studies*, 31(1), 22-39.
- Barrera, A. (2015). The Congo trap: MONUSCO islands of stability in the sea of instability. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 4(1), 1-16.
- Bergmann, J. (2018). Neofunctionalism and EU external policy integration: The case of capacity building in support of security and development (CBSD). *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26(9), 1253-1272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2018.1526204>
- Berwouts, K. (2017). *Congo's violent peace: Conflict and struggle since the Great African War*. Zed Books.
- Brosig, M. (2013). Introduction: The African security regime complex-Exploring converging actors and policies. *African Security*, 6(3-4), 171-190.
- Buzan, B. (1991). *People, states, and fear: An agenda for international security studies in the post-cold war era* (2nd ed.). Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Buzan, B., & Wæver, O. (2003). *Regions and powers: The structure of international security*. Cambridge University Press.
- Carter, S. (2025, June 19). U.S. brokers deal between Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda to end war over mineral wealth. CBS News.
- CCR (Centre for Conflict Resolution). (2010). Post-conflict reconstruction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Policy advisory group seminar report. http://dev.ccr.org.za/images/pdfs/Vol36postconflictconstruction_mar2011.pdf
- Coleman, K. P. (2011). Innovations in 'African solutions to African problems': The evolving practice of regional peacekeeping in sub-Saharan Africa. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 49(4), 517-545. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X11000462>
- De, Prabil et al. (2025). Regionalism and polycrisis: How to Promote Regional Integration in the Face of Global Fragmentation. UNU-CRIS Policy Brief No 25.04.
- Donges, J. F. (2024). Global polycrisis: The causal mechanisms of crisis entanglement. *Global Sustainability*, 7, e6. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2024.1>
- EAC. (2022a). Communiqué on the Signing of the Treaty of Accession of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the Treaty of the Establishment of the East African

- Community, State House, Nairobi, Kenya. EAC Secretariat, Arusha. 8 April 2022. <https://www.eac.int/communique/2410-communiqu%C3%A9-on-the-signing-of-the-treaty-of-accession-of-the-democratic-republic-of-congo-to-the-treaty-for-the-establishment-of-the-east-africa-community>.
- EAC. (2022b). Communiqué: Consultative Meeting Between H.E. President Félix Antoine Tshisekedi of The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) And the Facilitator of the EAC-Led Nairobi Process, H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta, on the Security Situation in Eastern DRC, Kinshasa, The Democratic Republic of Congo, 14th November, 2022. <https://www.eac.int/communique/2673-communiqu%C3%A9-of-the-consultative-meeting-between-h-e-president-fe%C3%A9lix-tshisekedi-and-h-e-uhuru-kenyatta>.
- EAC. (2022c). Communiqué of the 19th Extra-Ordinary Summit of The East African Community Heads of State 29th March, 2022, EAC Secretariat, Arusha. <https://www.eac.int/communique/2401-19th-extra-ordinary-summit-of-the-east-african-community-heads-of-state>
- EAC. (2022d). Communiqué: The Third Heads of State Conclave on The Democratic Republic of Congo-The Nairobi Process, 20th June, 2022, Nairobi, Kenya. <https://www.eac.int/communique/2504-communiqu%C3%A9-the-third-heads-of-state-conclave-on-the-democratic-republic-of-congo-the-nairobi-process>
- EAC. (2022e). Communiqué of the 22nd EAC Extra Ordinary Summit of the Heads of State. July 22, EAC Secretariat. <https://www.eac.int/communique/2537-communiqu%C3%A9-of-the-22nd-ordinary-summit-of-the-east-african-community-heads-of-state>
- EAC-SADC. (2025a). Joint Communiqué of the EAC-SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government. Dar es Salaam, February 8, <https://www.eac.int/communique/3302-communiqu%C3%A9-of-the-joint-eac-sadc-summit-of-heads-of-state-and-government>
- EAC-SADC. (2025b). Statement of the Joint EAC-SADC Process on the Progress in Restoration of Peace and Security in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. <https://www.president.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/>
- EAC-SADC. (2025c). Communiqué of the 2nd Joint EAC-SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government. Dar es Salaam, March 24, Tanzania.
- EAC-SADC. (2025d). Communiqué of the Joint EAC-SADC Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government. Dar es Salaam, 13rd August, <https://www.eac.int/communique/3415-communiqu%C3%A9-joint-eac-sadc-extra-ordinary-summit-of-heads-of-state-and-government>
- Fabricius, P. (2020). Reinventing the Force Intervention Brigade. *ISS Today*. December 4, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/reinventing-the-force-intervention-brigade>
- Fawcett, L. (2017). Regionalism in world politics: A new agenda. *International Affairs*, 93(2), 445-462.
- Giblin, J. (2024). The Force Intervention Brigade: A conscious departure. *Journal of International Humanitarian Legal Studies*, 15(2), 209-227. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18781527-bja10105>
- Haas, E. B. (1958). *The uniting of Europe: Political, social, and economic forces, 1950-1957*. Stanford University Press.
- Handy, P. S. (2025a). Anatomy of SADC's failure in eastern DRC. *ISS Today*. March 20, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/anatomy-of-sadc-s-failure-in-eastern-drc>
- Handy, P. S. (2025b). Diplomacy without deterrence won't bring peace in eastern DRC. *ISS Today*. August 15, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/diplomacy-without-deterrence-won-t-bring-peace-in-eastern-drc>
- Handy, P. S. (2025c). African solutions have not solved the Great Lakes problems. *ISS Today*. May 13. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/african-solutions-have-not-solved-the-great-lakes-problems>
- Helleiner, E. (2025). International finance and the global polycrisis. *Finance and Space*, 2(1), 221-236. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2833115X.2025.2514272>
- Hettne, B., & Inotai, A. (1994). The new regionalism: Implications for global development. *Futures*, 26(9), 986-999.
- Hettne, B. (2008). Security regionalisms in theory and practice. In H. G. Brauch et al. (Eds.), *Globalization and environmental challenges: Reconceptualizing security in the 21st century* (pp. 403-412). Springer.
- Kan, P. R. (2019). *The global challenge of militias and paramilitary violence*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kisangani, E. (2012). *Civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 1960-2010*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Mattli, W. (1999). *The logic of regional integration: Europe and beyond*. Cambridge University Press.
- Morin, E., & Kerne, A. B. (1993). *Terre-Patrie*. Éditions du Seuil.
- Muraya, B. J., & Ahere, J. (2014). Perpetuation of instability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: When the Kivus sneeze, Kinshasa catches a cold. *African Center for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes*, 1, 1-45.

- Nantulya, P. (2024). Understanding the Democratic Republic of the Congo's push for MONUSCO's departure. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. May 20.
- Ngoma, N., 2004, 'Hawks, Doves or Penguins? A Critical Review of the SADC Military Intervention in the DRC', Institute for Security Studies Occasional Paper 88, Pretoria.
- OCHA. (2025). Humanitarian coordinator statement to the member states briefing on the humanitarian situation in the DRC. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. March 25.
- Relief web. (1998). DRC: Zimbabwe says SADC to back Kabila. Nairobi. 19 August. <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/drc-zimbabwe-says-sadc-back-kabila>
- Rufanges, C. J., & Aspa, J. M. R. (2016). Democratic Republic of Congo: A review of 20 years of war. <https://escolapau.uab.cat/img/programas/alerta/alerta/RDCongo20AnosGuerrall.pdf>
- Sabala, K., & Muhindo, V. J. (2024). The East African Community Regional Force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Successes, challenges and prospects. African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 24(3). https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.10520/ejc-accordrv24n3_a2
- SADC. (2024). Deployment of the SADC mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. SADC News, January 4. <https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2024-01/SAMIDRC%20Deployment%20-%20Press%20Release.pdf>
- SADC (2003): Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation. Gaborone: SADC
- Schmitter, P. C. (1969). Contribution to a theory of regional integration. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Sheeran, S., & Case, S. (2014). The intervention brigade: Legal issues for the UN in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/267461654/The-Intervention-Brigade-Legal-Issues-for-the-UN-in-the-Democratic-Republic-of-the-Congo>
- Stearns, J. K. (2021). The war that doesn't say its name: The unending conflict in the Congo. Princeton University Press.
- Sweet, R. (2019). Militarizing the peace: UN intervention against Congo's 'terrorist' rebels. Kellogg Institute for International Studies. <https://kellogg.nd.edu/news/militarizing-peace-un-intervention-against-congo-s-'terrorist'-rebels>
- Söderbaum, F., & Hettne, B. (2010). Regional security in a global perspective. In U. Engel & J. G. Porto (Eds.), Africa's new peace and security architecture: Promoting norms, institutionalizing solutions (pp. 13–30). Ashgate.
- The Conversation. (2023). East Africa's troops are leaving the DRC: what went wrong and what comes next. December 11. <https://theconversation.com/east-africas-troops-are-leaving-the-drc-what-went-wrong-and-what-comes-next-219500>
- Tricontinental. (2024). The War in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Will End: The Twenty-Seventh Newsletter (2024), Tricontinental Newsletter: The Institute of Social Research. 04 July. <https://thetricontinental.org/newsletterissue/congo-dossier/>
- Tooze, A. (2022, October 28). Welcome to the world of the polycrisis. Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/498398e7-11b1-494b-9cd3-6d669dc3de33>
- U.S. Department of State. (2025). Furthering implementation of the peace agreement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda. August 11. <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/08/furthering->
- UN. (2023). DR Congo president sets early withdrawal of UN peacekeepers; country will take reins of its destiny. UN News, September 20. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/09/1141182>
- UN. (2024). MONUSCO ending its mission in South Kivu after more than 20 Years of Service. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/monusco-ending-its-mission-south-kivu-after-more-20-years-of-service>
- UN. (2025). Humanitarian coordinator statement to the member states briefing on the humanitarian situation in the DRC. United Nations Secretariat Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator Democratic Republic of Congo. March 2025.
- UN Great Lakes Office. (2025). The peace, security and cooperation framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region: A framework of hope. https://ungreatlakes.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/pscflyerenglish_2.pdf
- UN-OHCHR. (2025). Türk appalled by attacks against civilians by Rwandan-backed M23 and other armed groups. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/drc-turk-appalled-attacks-against-civilians-rwandan-backed-m23-and-other>
- UNSC. (2013a). Cooperation between United Nations, regional, subregional organizations 'mainstay' of international relations, Security Council hears throughout day-long debate.

- UNSC. (2013b). Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region, June 28, (S/2013/387). <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2013/387>
- UNSC. (2013c). Resolution 2098 (2013): 'Intervention Brigade' Authorized as Security Council Grants Mandate Renewal for United Nations Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo, Adopted by the Security Council at its 6943rd meeting, on 28 March 2013, S /RES/2098 (2013). United Nations.
- UNSC. (2014). Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2014/153).
- UNSC. (2017). Security Council grants mandate extension for United Nations peacekeeping mission in Democratic Republic of Congo, while reducing troop ceiling.
- UNSC. (2025a). Resolution 2211 on the Situation of the Democrat Republic of Congo, adopted by the Security Council at its 7415th meeting, on March 26. S/RES/2211(2015).
- UNSC. (2025b). Letter dated 23 May 2025 from the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2025/324), June 2.
- Varin, C., & Abubakar, D. (2017). Violent non-state actors in Africa. In C. Varin & D. Abubakar (Eds.), *Violent non-state actors in Africa* (pp. xx-xx). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Weiss, H. (2000). *War and peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo*. NORDISKA.
- Wilén, N. (2012). Intervention, justifications and interpretations: The case of the SADC in the Congo. In *Justifying interventions in Africa* (pp. xx-xx). Palgrave Macmillan.

Beyond Borders: Evaluating EAC and SADC Roles in Sustainable Peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of Congo Polycrisis
 UNU-CRIS Working Paper #6 2026

Copyright © United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies 2026

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and editors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the countries of which they are nationals, nor those of the United Nations University, UNU-CRIS, or their governing and advisory bodies.

The designations employed, the presentation of material, and the use

of the names of countries, territories, cities or areas in this publication, including on any maps, do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations University, UNU-CRIS, or their governing and advisory bodies, concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Publisher: United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS), Bruges, Belgium

Copyright © 2026 United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies