SLOW PROGRESS AND EMERGING ALLIANCES ON GERD NEGOTIATIONS

The involvement of the Arab League in pressurizing Ethiopia over GERD might spark proxy wars in the region and further complicate the fragile relationships among concerned countries. For instance, Djibouti’s role to hold talks with Egyptian president was perceived as part of Egyptian diplomatic attempts to build more African alliances amid an ongoing water dispute with Ethiopia. Indeed, Egypt recently concluded a cooperation protocol with South Sudan on the construction of a dam to generate cheaper electricity and control floods. While Egypt has been making rounds of talks, military drills and visits in neighboring countries, Ethiopian and Russian security services have also agreed to strengthen their cooperation in areas of security and other sectors.

Another game of alliance is Cairo and Khartoum recent attempts to involve the United States, European Union and the UN in the African Union-led negotiation a position rejected by Ethiopia. Egypt and Sudan Foreign Affairs and Irrigation Ministers have accused Ethiopia of being ‘intransigent’ with a promise to give more pressure on Ethiopia to reach agreement before GERD’s second filling starts in July. Although the likelihood of the conflicting parties going to war appear remote, threats of proxy violent conflicts and uncertainties in the region can be avoided if and when the outcome of the AU-led mediation, recently boosted by UNSC decision, becomes positive.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES RELATED TO PRICE HIKES AND TAXATION

KENYA is keen on debt repayment extension from its external lenders to help stabilize the economy from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. While the extension period is unknown, Kenya is set to receive Sh80 billion (USD750 million) from World Bank and Sh43.8 billion (USD410 million) from International Monetary Fund (IMF) by end of June. At the same time, calls are being made on the government to roll out economic stimulus programmes to reinvigorate the country’s economy. The $750 million loan to support in post Covid-19 recovery survived at 3.1 per cent will support measures to improve medium-term fiscal and debt sustainability through greater transparency and efficiency in government spending policy reforms. The country just introduced a 16% VAT on liquefied natural gas, which together with high cost of petrol, diesel and paraffin is likely to put more pressure on the household expenditures. In spite of the 2021-22 budget, Kenya’s economy might plummet lower than expected especially during the impending referendum and forthcoming election.

SOUTH SUDAN is to mortgage crude oil for loan repayments following a received loan from the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) in 2020 which requires repayment. South Sudan economy has continued to present worrying situation and the current need to repay the loan will put more pressure on the economy, whose effect will be high cost of living in a country emerging from violent conflict.

IN SUDAN fuel price hikes sparked new popular protests in Khartoum. Sudanese in Khartoum State, took to the streets on 10 June to protest the government decision to increase fuel prices. All fuel stations were asked to increase the price of a gallon of benzene from 675 Sudanese pounds to 1,305 pounds. The protesters blocked main and secondary streets in Khartoum, Khartoum North, and Omdurman with heavy stones, and set car tires on fire.
IN UGANDA the government has introduced six tax policy measures to increase domestic revenue to fund the budget. The taxes were introduced for revenue collection and safeguard the government from the constraint of increasing public debt. The taxes include that on internet data packages. The newly presented National Budget for the Financial Year 2021/22, projects domestic revenue for next financial year at Shs22.425 trillion, equivalent to 13.8 percent of GDP, compared to a projected outturn of Shs19.432 trillion, equivalent to 13.1 per cent of GDP in FY 2020/21. This is not enough to service public debt. With the population that are hard pressed with impacts of Covid-19, the taxation policies and their implementations will likely continue to face challenges.

PROLONGED TIGRAY CONFLICT AND CALLS FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

The war in Tigray is continuing despite an announcement of a ceasefire by the Ethiopian government. Over 6.3 million people in Tigray are reportedly requiring immediate humanitarian assistance. According to June CEWARN report, there are widespread concerns about the serious risk of famine in the next two months where more than 90% needing emergency food aid, and over 350,000 people are reported to have been facing catastrophic food insecurity. While heavy fighting reportedly continues between TPLF and Ethiopia’s federal troops, thousands of people have been killed and millions displaced in the war that started almost eight months ago.

SOMALIA REGAINS SUCCESSES OVER AL-SHABAAB

Al-Shabaab militias are being attacked massively over the past two months. About 100 al-Shabaab militants were reportedly killed in recent operations in the Middle Shabelle region of Southern Somalia, 25 al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabaab terrorists were killed in the Central Hiraan province. The army reportedly killed nearly another 20 Al-Shabaab terrorists in the southern province of Middle Shabelle. As the attacks on the Al-Shabaab militias intensify, 17 insurgents were killed in central Somalia while 37 al-Shabaab militants in Middle Shabelle region were killed. However, Al-Shabaab are still adamant showing signs of resilience after they killed at least 15 people in suicide bombing at army camp in Somalia. From the attacks and counter attacks, the month of June has registered a spike in fatalities related to Al-Shabaab activities, as reported in CEWARN Statistical report on Al-Shabaab attacks in Somalia for the month of June. Meanwhile, the Pentagon is developing a proposal to send dozens of Special Forces trainers back to Somalia to help local forces combat al-Shabaab. AMISOM confirmed that operations to degrade Al-Shabaab in Southern Somalia had resulted in the militants losing ground against AMISOM and the Somali security forces. While Al-Shabaab seems to be reducing attacks it is noted that combating elusive terror groups must be tailored with new technology and people’s information, especially where, Al-Shabaab members seem to be on the run after intensive attacks over their locations in Southern Somalia and other strongholds.

COVID-19 CASES SURGE IN UGANDA AND KENYA

Covid-19 infections and deaths have reached alarming proposition in Uganda where the initial total lockdown has been extended up to end of July 2021. Uganda is facing a high surge in COVID-19 infections and deaths with positivity rate of over 15%, which has led the President to declare a lockdown for the next 42 days effective June 18th, 2021. The country is reported to be running out of oxygen leading to increase in number of deaths. The Parliament has also been suspended to contain the spread.

IN KENYA, the highly contagious Covid-19 delta variant may spark a fourth wave of infections over the next two months, according to the East African Nation’s Health Ministry. The rapidly transmissible strain, first identified in India, is dominant in western Kenya. The government imposed restrictions on movement in the region to try and stem it from spreading nationwide. Uganda and Kenya had fared very well at the initial stages of controlling Covid-19 spread, but many factors including electoral processes could have led to the widespread infections and deaths in Uganda and the lake region of Kenya. Meanwhile, the impact of the lockdown in both neighbouring countries will be felt especially in the economic sectors as businesses continue to be affected.

IN ETHIOPIA, although cases showed marked downward trend, the country may experience, as has been seen in Kenya and Uganda, a surge following election related activities that involved close interaction of people.

PERSISTENT INTER COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN SOUTH SUDAN INCLUDING RAIDS, CATTLE THEFTS, KILLINGS AND ATTACKS

CEWARN reports since January 2021 have continued to flag the persistent inter-communal clashes, which although are mostly related to cattle theft, revenge, abduction of women and children, the cycle keeps going on, which is like to have a bearing on consolidation of peace in South Sudan. Many incidences of raids, killings and inter-communal attacks, and attacks on foreign workers, has shown weaknesses in responding to these incidences by South Sudan’s security. In the month of June, 2 construction workers were killed along the Juba-Terekeka Road, and one Aid worker was assaulted making the South Sudan Red Cross to suspend its operations in Torit; 3 people were killed, 6 were wounded in Yirol West attacks; 7 people were killed in Pigi County attack; 15 people were killed at Mangol Apuk village of Warreip state; and 2 people were killed in Kapoeta North cattle raid. Others are, 2 humanitarian health workers killed, 2 injured in Lakes State ambush; a Ugandan registered truck was torched along the Ikwooto-Tsereterya road which leads to Uganda; a truck driver transporting cattle to Juba was shot dead and 47 cows looted from their vehicle in Rumbek East County; at least four people have been killed, seven others wounded and over 350 head of cattle raided from Rumbek Centre County of Lakes State by armed youth suspected to have come from Panyijiar County in neighboring Unity State; and at least two people, including a driver, were killed in a road ambush along the Mundri-Juba while traveling to Juba City. Along these, there is emerging youth-related violence targeting local and international organizations in a move likely to slide into xenophobic attack as the youth agitate for meaningful engagement.
SLOWED IMPLEMENTATION OF PEACE AGREEMENTS

Sudan’s peace efforts continue to be tested as armed group’s signatory of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) renewed accusations that the lack of political will is behind the non-implementation of the security arrangements. The army repeated that the operation needs 187 million dollars, which they do not have for the time being. Sudan Sovereign Council’s decision to establish a joint force to maintain security in the capital sparked mixed reactions among the Sudanese people and some political forces. The Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) groups has rejected Sudan’s initiative to reform ruling coalition, saying that it hampers efforts to consolidate the coalition. Meanwhile, Darfur joint force for the protection of civilians plans to establish its joint forces. The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) are also being rejected by the Darfur based IDPs, arguing that some of JEM local leaders were among the perpetrators of the mass and individual killings, rape, looting, kidnapping, torture, burning, displacement, arrest and other crimes, a case which is under trial by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

In South Sudan, despite notable progress, implementation of the peace agreement remains slow. However, international partners have remained seized in supporting the process including IGAD Council of Ministers meeting that among others reviewed progress in implementation of South Sudan revitalized peace agreement and the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative (SRSG) for South Sudan reporting progress to the UNSC. These efforts, among others, are expected to focus the spotlight on the implementation of the revitalized peace agreement.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND FOOD INSECURITY

IGAD region has been battling issues of food security based on climate induced catastrophe. In the month of June 2021, Somalia is reported to be facing drought and rain deficit which is pushing more than 2.73 million people toward the crisis level of acute food insecurity. The country’s Ministry of Agriculture said the drought poses a major threat to Somalia’s fragile food security situation.

IN KENYA, two million people are reported at risk of hunger and starvation and may need emergency relief support, according to a report by global charity World Vision estimates. The report attributed the high levels of acute malnutrition to reduced milk production and consumption among children. This development comes on the back of a warning by the National Drought Management Authority in Kenya that 10 counties could be hard hit by drought. Marsabit, Mandera, Garissa, Wajir, Kilifi, Tana River, Lamu, Samburu, Kitui and Laikipia have been put on high alert for drought on the NDMA list in addition to parts of Isiolo, Baringo and Turkana counties. These counties also happen to be affected by perennial intercommunal and resource-based conflicts; and a spike in violent conflicts, with possible cross-border spillover, is anticipated if the drought hits the counties as warned.

MONTHLY ROUND UP
JUNE 2021