

Impact of Regional Integration on Poverty Reduction in Africa

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ABSTRACT

This Article explores and analyzes the widespread poverty situation on the African continent and the extent to which poverty should be remedied by member states in the African Union (AU) as a regional body. It finds out whether regional integration helps the African States and Governments to reduce poverty and how regional integration could be used to reduce or eradicate the multidimensional poverty on the continent within the framework of international cooperation and regional integration. It also reviews the progress Africa has made in terms of advancing towards the achievement of the goals in Agenda 2063 so far and the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The qualitative research method was used in conducting this research. Particularly, the exploratory, explanatory, descriptive and historical methods are employed in this essay because it delves into the key objectives of forming the AU that was originally the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU). The main objective was to achieve sustainable development on the continent. The research recommends that African states need to invest in the vulnerable populations on the continent to ensure peace and stability. This would in turn pave the way for economic growth and eventually culminate to sustainable development on the continent.

Key words: Regional integration, poverty alleviation, international cooperation, peace, and security; sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

This Article focuses on an analysis and description of poverty and the extent to which poverty is so widespread in Africa. This chapter finds out whether regional integration helps to reduce poverty on the continent or not. It discusses ways and means through which poverty could be reduced within the framework of international cooperation and regional integration. It also looks at the progress that Africa has made in terms of achieving the goals of its Agenda 2063 thus far and those of the SDGs. The exploratory, explanatory, descriptive and historical methods are employed in this chapter because it focuses on one of the key objectives of forming the AU. This objective was to achieve sustainable development on the continent.¹

THE STATE OF POVERTY IN AFRICA

Generally, Africa is considered as the 'capital of poverty'. This description is demeaning, but the conditions of millions of people living in extreme poverty on the continent is alarming. According to Francisco Ferreira of the World Bank, poverty rates remain high in Africa². He made this statement on a German public, state-owned international broadcaster funded by the German federal tax budget, Deutsche Welle a "German Wave" abbreviated in English as DW. He claimed that Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world where the overall number of extremely poor people is increasing rather than decreasing.³ In the 2018 World Bank's Poverty and Shared Prosperity report, DW asserts that "globally, rates of extreme poverty — defined as earning less than \$1.90 (€1.64) a day — have dramatically declined, falling from 1.9 billion in 1990 to

¹ Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000, e-source.

² Müller-Jung, 2018, e-sourc: <https://www.dw.com/en/world-bank-report-poverty-rates-remain-high-in-africa/a-45926382>.

³ Ibid.

approximately 736 million. However, an estimated 413 million people in Africa currently live in extreme poverty — more than half of the world's total".⁴

Friederike Müller-Jung of DW spoke with the World Bank's Senior Adviser on Development Research Group, Francisco Ferreira, about why poverty rates remain high in Africa and what efforts are being made to reduce same. In response to this question, Francisco Ferreira indicated that “conflict, institutional fragility and violence are associated with rising poverty; and of course, a number of the world's fragile and conflict-affected countries are in Africa”.⁵ Some of the African states embroiled in conflict are Central African Republic, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso, Somalia, Ethiopia, etc. This means that absence of law and order is clearly one of the big drivers of slow progress and increases in poverty in the region.

According to the WB Senior Adviser, the second reason for entrenched poverty in Africa is the rapid population growth of the continent. Accordingly, “this is very high particularly in the Sahel and parts of West Africa and it is associated with an increase in the numbers of the poor on the continent”.⁶ The third factor responsible for poverty in Africa is that economic growth is stagnated in most African countries. This means that for longer periods of time, “economic growth in Africa has been lower than in Asia, for example, which is the other region where there was a lot of poverty before, but it's been reducing much faster”.⁷

So, growth has been lower. And finally, Africa has been less pro-poor than in other regions. So not only is there less growth and it's more volatile but also, it's less good at reaching the poor and improving their conditions. Amidst these conditions, poverty may persist as predicted by the Head of the World Bank that has indicated that “the crisis facing development is intensifying as the global growth outlook weakens. Our latest forecasts indicate a sharp and long-lasting slowdown that will hit developing countries hard”.⁸

Making specific references to some African states, the World Bank development expert indicates that “Nigeria has at least two big factors that are associated with lower progress. One is the existence of a widespread conflict in the northeast of the country with Boko Haram while the other is a very pronounced dependence on an extractive industry, which is crude oil in the case of Nigeria”.⁹ Although Nigeria is now Africa's largest economy and it's well diversified in some ways, in terms of exports it's still hugely dependent on oil.

For its part, Equatorial Guinea with its crude Oil resource, Zambia for copper, and the DRC for a number of minerals, as well as several other countries are still very heavily reliant on extractive industries. “When a lot of the growth is coming from an industry that is capital intensive, that doesn't employ that many people, that doesn't have many linkages to the rest of the economy, that has long been a challenge that African policymakers”. Simply put, African countries do not diversify their growth corridors.

To address this, African states need to either shift the pattern of growth towards the sectors and places where the poor live or to redistribute the benefits of growth that takes place elsewhere, by investing in the poor people themselves, in their education and their health but also in the infrastructure services that they need to become productive. A case in point is the Republic of Nigeria, the most populous country in the continent. Nigeria is a country that has had a lot of success recently. The West African state overtook South Africa some years ago as the largest economy in the region. But it does struggle a lot to make sure that these macro- economic successes get translated into benefits for the poor. And that is in some sense emblematic of the region.

On the issue of countries that have made great progress in reducing poverty in Africa, evidence shows that Ethiopia, which despite political challenges has economically done quite well in terms of reducing poverty and

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Müller-Jung, 2018, e-source: <https://www.dw.com/en/world-bank-report-poverty-rates-remain-high-in-Africa/a-45926382>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ World Bank, 2023. see the Opening Remarks by World Bank Group President David Malpass during the Launch of the January 2023 Global Economic Prospects Report; <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2023/01/10/opening-remarks-by-world-bank-group-president-david-malpass-during-the-launch-the-january-2023-global-economic-prospects>.

⁹ Ibid.

helping to diversify its economy a little bit. It's still mostly an agricultural nation but it has had some growth in manufacturing. Of course, there are a lot of urban poor in Africa but many of the people living in extreme poverty in Africa are still in rural areas and are still involved in very low productivity agriculture. Policymakers must think about them and about bringing investments to them and to where they are.

The two key things that African states need to do to continue to diversify the economy, particularly in countries which are heavily dependent on one or a few extractive industries are that the benefits gained now need to be reinvested in more sustainable resources that won't run out eventually, and that capital must be reinvested in other forms of capital, primarily human capital. Countries become prosperous, like Germany or Denmark or the US, when they have educated, healthy people that are productive. That investment must be made in Africa as well. According to Francisco Ferreira

“It's not enough to build schools or health posts. It's more important to make sure that they are well staffed by teachers and health workers who turn up and are not absent a lot of the time. Also, investment in specific kinds of infrastructure would really make people more productive, investing in better roads and railways and investing in electricity that that is not only available but reliable. If people's goods can flow, their goods can reach markets. If electricity is reliable then manufacturing firms can come and invest. They will not do that if the electricity is there for only four hours a day. So, there's a lot of investment in human capital and infrastructure that would be very important. But none of this can work if there isn't solid democratic governance and the rule of law”¹⁰.

Does this mean that there is no economic growth at all in Africa? No. There is there is growth and there has been growth and when that growth takes place, there is some reduction in poverty. It's just been slower than one would have liked and slower than other regions or countries have managed to do. The current growth rates, no matter their size on the continent need to be accompanied by food being on the table of the poor, electricity reaching some village where previously it didn't reach, or new wells being dug so that women walk fewer hours to get water. So, there is a lot of that growth that is much less visible when one visits a big city but it's that kind of progress at the village level where the poor people live that would make a big difference to prosperity at the bottom of the distribution.

In terms of the economic outlook of the continent, If the region continues to perform as it has performed over the last ten years, then that outlook probably is not great. The World Bank estimates under the business-as-usual scenario that by 2030 “poverty in sub-Saharan Africa will still be as high as 25 percent, whereas in the rest of the world it's as low as 2 percent. If that's the case, then almost nine out of 10 poor people in the world will be living in Africa”.¹¹

Now can that be changed. Yes. Africa can change it if it makes the kinds of changes in governance, the kinds of improvements in the quality of governance and the kind of investments in human capital and infrastructure that are desired. This could lead to a more diversified economy. So, there's certainly a lot of hope. There's a lot of vibrant, creative, entrepreneurial people in Africa who could make a huge difference for the region.”

Bicaba, Brixiová, and Ncube argue that “eradicating extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030 is the first goal among the UN Sustainable Development Goals that guide the current development agenda.¹² They have examined the feasibility for Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the world's poorest but growing region ending widespread poverty. They have found out that under plausible assumptions “extreme poverty will not be eradicated in SSA by 2030, but it can be reduced to low levels through high growth and income redistribution towards the poor segments of the society”¹³.

This finding is further supported by the World Bank President who has indicated that “in Sub-Saharan Africa,

¹⁰ Müller-Jung, 2018, e-source: <https://www.dw.com/en/world-bank-report-poverty-rates-remain-high-in-Africa/a-45926382>.

¹¹ Müller-Jung, 2018, e-sourc: <https://www.dw.com/en/world-bank-report-poverty-rates-remain-high-in-Africa/a-45926382>.

¹² Bicaba, Brix ova, and Ncube, 2017, p.1.

¹³ Ibid.

which is home to 60% of the world's poor, per-capita income growth is expected to average just 1.2% over the next two years—a rate that would cause poverty rates to rise, not fall”.¹⁴ Therefore, national, and regional policies should aim at structural transformation and industrialization that would make their growth paths more inclusive and ‘green’. International organizations, including informal ones such as the G20, can play a critical role in this endeavor by encouraging policy coordination and coherence. Further, African countries will need a greater scope for bringing their perspectives into global economic debates on issues impacting sustainable development on the continent.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION ON POVERTY REDUCTION IN AFRICA

At the January 2013 African Union Summit, African Heads of State and Government adopted Agenda 2063 (‘The Africa We Wan’) as “the continent’s blueprint and master plan for sustainable development and economic growth on the continent. This was an affirmation and commitment by African leaders to transform Africa into the global powerhouse”¹⁵. Agenda 2063 brings the continent together to attain ‘The Africa we Want’ for “an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, and representing a dynamic force in the international arena”.¹⁶

To fast-track the implementation of Agenda 2063 over the 50 -year period, “the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan spanning from 2014 to 2023 was developed and subsequently endorsed at the June 2015 Summit of the African Union”.¹⁷ This plan encapsulates a set of goals, priority areas and targets that the continent aims to achieve at national, regional, and continental levels by the end of 2023. According to the African Union, Agenda 2063 is “Africa’s development blueprint to achieve inclusive and sustainable socio- economic development over a 50-year period”.¹⁸ The continent aims to achieve this objective through the realisation of five consecutive ten-year implementation plans.

To report on the progress of this milestone, the African Union Commission, and the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) were tasked by policy organs of the African Union to coordinate and prepare continental-level biennial performance reports. These reports track and present progress made towards the achievement of the goals and targets of Agenda 2063. The first assessment report was prepared and published in 2019 while the second was prepared and released to the public in 2022. These continental-level reports consolidate progress reports made by the African continent thus far in achieving Agenda 2063.¹⁹

From 2014 Africa embarked on the implementation of her 50 -year development blueprint through domesticating and implementing Agenda 2063 into national and regional development strategies, achieving “an aggregate score of 32% of the targets. This report covered 31 out of 55 AU Member States. This was 56% of the continent”.²⁰ The second assessment report in 2022 indicates an aggregate score of “51% against the 2021 targets.

This second report accounts for 38 AU Member States out of 55”.²¹ Comparatively, the continent performed quite strongly and better in 2022 than in 2019. This incremental success is credited to improved planning, closer collaboration around the common Agenda 2063 targets, and improved governance on the continent. Conversely, there has been slow progress in some areas for several reasons including limited implementation capacity and the global COVID-19 pandemic that impacted all socio-economic aspects of life in Africa.²²

¹⁴ World Bank, 2023. see the Opening Remarks by World Bank Group President David Malpass during the Launch of the January 2023 Global Economic Prospects Report; <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2023/01/10/opening-remarks-by-world-bank-group-president-david-malpass-during-the-launch-the-january-2023-global-economic-prospects>.

¹⁵ First Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2019, p. II.

¹⁶ Second Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2022, p.1.

¹⁷ First Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2019, p. II.

¹⁸ Second Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2022, p.1.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ First Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2019, p. II.

²¹ Second Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2022, p.1.

²² Second Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2022, p.1.

The 38 African Union Member states that reported during the second assessment are “Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Cote D’Ivoire, Egypt, Eswatini, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Saharawi Rep. Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe”.²³

The African continental agenda for sustainable development is anchored on seven aspirations. Therefore, these two reports measure progress towards the realization of these aspirations. Based on the 2019 progress report, the continent saw a weak performance under Aspiration 1 (A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development) with an aggregate score of 29%.²⁴ Even though a strong performance was achieved for Goal “A high standard of living, quality of life and well-being for all” – attributed to the exponential growth in the percentage of the population with access to internet. Similarly, relatively good progress was made on Aspiration 2, which calls for “an integrated continent, politically united that is based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of an African Renaissance”, with a score of 44%.²⁵

Furthermore, low scores were recorded on matters pertaining to good governance, democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law – related to Aspiration 3 with an aggregate score of 16%. This was mainly due to high levels of corruption in delivering public services; weak mechanisms and institutions of holding leaders accountable; and low freedom of the press. integration of indigenous African culture, values, and language into primary and secondary schools’ curricula.

The continent registered a good performance on Aspiration 4 (A peaceful and secure Africa) with 48%. Most Member States reported the existence of functional national peace mechanisms, in addition to the continental-level Africa Peace and Security Architecture. The continent saw a very weak performance on Aspiration 5 (An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values, and beliefs) with the continental score standing at 12% against the 2019 target.

Aspiration 6 (An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of the African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children) recorded a relatively strong performance of 38%. This was attributed, amongst others, to the implementation of the provisions of the African Charter on the Rights of the Youth which scored 77% of the 2019 target.²⁶

In the second progress report, Africa recorded a positive upward trend in respect of all seven aspirations vis-à-vis the 2021 targets. The continent achieved low progress for Aspiration 1 (A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development) with an overall score of 37% against the 2021 targets. This can be attributed mainly to a decrease in “GDP per capita from USD3,170 in 2019 to USD2,910 in 2021 and high unemployment rates”.²⁷ Notwithstanding the moderate performance under this aspiration, there was commendable progress in access to electricity and internet. Furthermore, there were substantial gains in health-related goals including increased access to sexual and reproductive health services and reduced maternal mortality.

The continent made significant progress in the attainment of Aspiration 2 (An integrated continent politically united and based on the ideal of Pan- Africanism and the Vision for Africa’s Renaissance). The strong performance of 84% was realized mainly through progress in the signature and ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, which came into effect on 1 January 2021 with the establishment and operationalization of a well-functioning AfCFTA Secretariat in Accra, Ghana. So far, 43 countries representing 78% of AU membership have submitted their tariff offers.

There was an overall weak performance of 42% for Aspiration 3 “An Africa of good governance, democracy,

²³ Ibid, p. VII.

²⁴ First Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2019.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Second Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2022, p.2.

respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law”²⁸ mainly due to low scores for capable institutions and transformed leadership at all levels. Nevertheless, most Member States had a satisfactory performance. They reported progress in promoting good governance, democratic values, and practices, including the domestication of the African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance.

Similarly, progress was recorded in the attainment of Aspiration 4 (A peaceful and secure Africa) with an overall performance of 63% against the 2021 targets, although performance varied across parameters and countries. The data received from Member States indicates a significant decline in the number of deaths emanating from armed conflict and from religious and ethnic disagreement and intolerance. There was moderate progress of 45% with regards to Aspiration 5 (An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values, and ethics).

This is due largely to the weak integration of indigenous African culture, values, and language into primary and secondary school curricula. With a 67% score, there was also significant progress under Aspiration 6 “An Africa whose development is people- driven, relying on the potential of the African People, particularly its Women and Youth and caring for children”.²⁹

During the period under review, the continent registered a slight increase in the proportion of women in the agricultural population who have ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, as well the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, regional and local bodies. However, Africa did not meet youth-related goals and targets, registering only a minimal reduction in youth unemployment rates. This moderate performance is also due to an increase in rates of child labor and children marriage.

In the pursuit of Aspiration 7 (Africa as a strong influential partner), the continent achieved an overall commendable performance of 58% evidenced by the proportion of public sector budget funded by national capital markets as well as the proportion of official development assistance (ODA) in national budgets. The continent did not, however, meet the 2021 target of increasing total tax revenue as a percentage of GDP to ensure that Africa takes full ownership of her development efforts. Graph 3 shows the continental progress made at the aspirational level in 2022.³⁰



Graph 3: Continental progress in Africa at aspirational level in 2022

Source: Second Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2022.

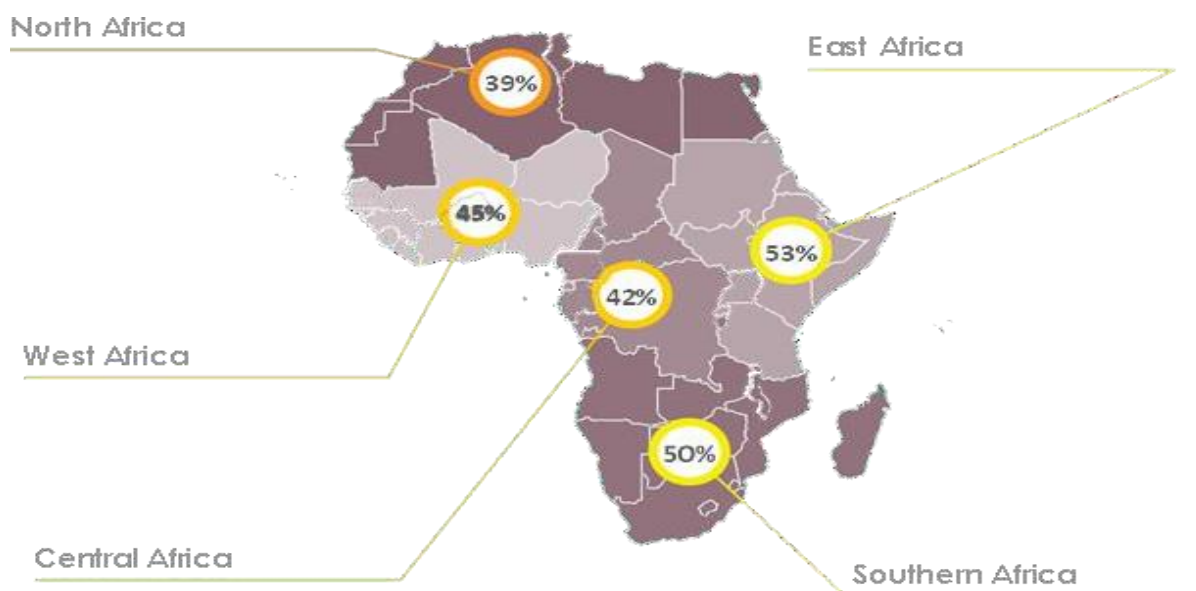
At the regional level, East Africa recorded the highest performance in five out of the seven aspirations in Agenda 2063 First Ten Year Implementation Plan with an aggregate score of 40% against the 2019 targets.

²⁸ Ibid, p.2.

²⁹ Ibid, p.3.

³⁰ Second Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2022, p.2.

The aggregate performance of West Africa stood at 34%, while the aggregate performance of North Africa stood at 27%. Southern and Central Africa both recorded an aggregate score of 25% against the 2019 targets. In the 2022 progress report at the regional level, “East Africa recorded the highest performance with an aggregate score of 53% against the 2021 targets, followed by Southern Africa with 50%. West Africa scored 45%, Central Africa 42% and North Africa 39%”.³¹ Below is a graphic presentation of progress made for on the achievements of AUC aspirations at regional levels.³²



Graph 4: Regional Progress in AFRICA at Aspiration-level

Source: Second Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, 2022.

Some progress was made on the implementation of Agenda 2063 Flagship Projects. The continent made progress in implementing the Agenda 2063 Flagship Projects. The greatest progress occurred with the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area. Currently, 54 AU Member States have signed the AfCFTA Agreement, 42 Member States have ratified it, and 39 have deposited their instruments of ratification. This demonstrates a high level of political commitment to achieving market integration in Africa. On trade in goods, Member States have made commitments to substantially liberalize all trade by eliminating tariffs.

There was also progress in the implementation of the Pan- African E-Network, which aims to establish policies and strategies to create transformative e-applications and services in Africa, especially the intra-African broadband terrestrial infrastructure and cyber security. The Agreement has been signed by 48 of the 55 AU Member States. There was progress in the implementation of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), which aims to strengthen intra-regional connectivity between the capital cities of African countries and ensure the availability of a single unified air transport market in Africa.

Thirty-five AU Member States, which constitute 89% of intra-Africa air traffic, have signed the solemn commitment to support the full operationalization. Furthermore, the regulatory instruments for the implementation of the SAATM have been drafted. These include consumer protection regulations, competition regulations and the rules of procedures of the SAATM Executing Agency, the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC).

Besides the seven aspirations and flagship projects in the Agenda 2063 discussed above, the continental development agenda has 20 goals with several key transformational outcomes under these twenty goals. Below are the key transformational outcomes in the Agenda 2063 aspirations, goals, and priorities.³³

³¹ Ibid, p.3.

³² Ibid.

³³ Agenda 2063, 2013. E-source: <https://au.int/agenda2063/goals>.

Conditions for achieving African Union's aspirations in the Agenda 2063

To achieve the aspirations, goals, and priorities of the African Sustainable Development (Agenda 2063), African governments identify several key benefits to Africans if the programmes identified in the strategic development framework are initiated and implemented in the FTYIP. Africa is expected to show improved standards of living; transformed, inclusive and sustained economies; increased levels of regional and continental integration; a population of empowered women and youth and a society in which children are cared for and protected; societies that are peaceful, demonstrate good democratic values and practice good governance principles and which preserve and enhance Africa's cultural identity. Below are the key specific indicators:

"Improvements in Living Standards

- ✓ Real per-capita incomes would be a third more than 2023 levels.
- ✓ Incidence of hunger, especially amongst Women and Youth will only be 20% of 2023 levels.
- ✓ Job opportunities will be available to at least one in four people looking for work.
- ✓ At least one out of every three children will have access to kindergarten education with every child of secondary school age in school and seven out of ten of its graduates without access to tertiary education enrolled in TVET programmes.
- ✓ Malnutrition, maternal, child and neo-natal deaths as at 2023 would be reduced by half; access to anti-retroviral will be automatic and proportion of deaths attributable to HIV/AIDs and malaria would have been halved.
- ✓ Nine out of ten people will have access to safe drinking water and sanitation; electricity supply and internet connectivity will be up by 50% and cities will be recycling at least 50% of the waste they generate.

Transformed, Inclusive and Sustainable Economies

- ✓ GDP will be growing at 7% and at least a third of the outputs will be generated by national firms.
- ✓ Labour intensive manufacturing, underpinned by value addition to commodities and doubling of the total agricultural factor productivity will be attained by 2023.
- ✓ The beginnings of value addition blue economy – fisheries, eco-friendly coastal tourism, marine bio-technology products, and port operations- will emerge.
- ✓ Creative arts businesses will be contributing twice as much to real terms as their 2013 contribution to GDP.
- ✓ ICT penetration and contribution to real GDP in absolute terms would be double of 2013 levels.
- ✓ Regional industrialization hubs linked to the global value chains and commodity exchanges will be in place by 2023.
- ✓ At least 17% of terrestrial and inland water and 10% of coastal and marine areas would have been preserved and 30% of farmers, fisher folks and pastoralists will be practicing climate resilient production systems.
- ✓ Integrated Africa.
- ✓ There will be free movement of goods, services, and capital; and persons travelling to any member

state could get the visa at the point of entry.

- ✓ The volume of intra-African trade especially in agricultural value-added products would increase three-fold by 2023.
- ✓ The African Customs Union, an African Common Market and an African Monetary Union will be operational by 2023.
- ✓ The African Speed Train Network will have passed the inception stage and will be taking its first passengers between two connected cities.
- ✓ African Skies will be open to all African Airlines.
- ✓ Regional power pools are boosted by at least 50% increase in power generation and the INGA dam will be operational and will contribute to the powering of the industrial transformation of the continent and comfort of the citizenry.
- ✓ African Education Accreditation Agency and a common educational system are in place and the African Youth will have the choice to study at any university and work any where on the continent.
- ✓ Empowered Women, Youth and Children
- ✓ All obstacles related to Women owing/inheriting property or business, signing a contract, owning, or managing a bank account would be removed by 2023.
- ✓ At least one in five women would have access to and control of productive assets.
- ✓ Gender parity in control, representation, advancement will be the norm in all AU Organs and the RECs.
- ✓ All forms of violence against women would have been reduced by a third in 2023.
- ✓ All harmful social norms and customary practices would have ended by 2023.
- ✓ The African Youth will be mobile and 15% of all new businesses will emanate from their ingenuity and talent and the proportion of 2013 youth unemployed will be reduced by at least a quarter.
- ✓ Child labor exploitation, marriages, trafficking, and soldiering would have ended by 2023.
- ✓ Well-governed, peaceful, and cultural centric Africa in a Global Context
- ✓ Democratic values and culture as enshrined in the African Governance Architecture would have been entrenched by 2023.
- ✓ At least seven out of ten persons in every member state of the union will perceive elections to be free, fair, and credible; democratic institutions, processes, and leaders accountable; the judiciary impartial and independent; and the legislature independent and key component of the national governance process.
- ✓ African Peer Review Mechanism will have been ascribed to by all Member States and its positive impact on governance metrics felt.
- ✓ All guns would have been silenced by 2023.
- ✓ All Member States of the Union will have in place local and national mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution.
- ✓ All Member States of the Union will have in place a dual citizen's programme for the diaspora.

- ✓ The Encyclopedia Africana will be launched by the 2023 Assembly of the Union.
- ✓ One in five Polytechniques will be offering programmes in the creative arts and management of micro cultural enterprises to support the growth of the creative arts businesses.
- ✓ Local content in all print and electronic media would have increased by 60%.
- ✓ At least 30% of all cultural patrimonies would have been retrieved by 2023.
- ✓ An African Space Agency would have been established by 2023.
- ✓ An African Global Platform will be in place by 2017 and will contribute to an increase in the share of Africa's exports in global exports in 2023 by at least 20%.
- ✓ The African Investment Bank, the African Guarantee Facility, the African Remittances Institute and at least 2 Regional Stock Exchanges would have been established and functioning.
- ✓ National capital markets will contribute at least 10% of development financing and the proportion of aid in the national budget will be no more than 25% of the 2013 level".³⁴

REGIONAL INTEGRATION GAINS OF THE AU

The African Union was established in July 2002 with the primary mandate to promote peace, security, democratic principles, good governance, and stability in Africa.³⁵ This was against the backdrop of the challenges its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity, had had in managing conflicts and economic realities in Africa, as well as major global shifts which required the continent to act differently. At the time of the formation of the AU, it was clear that the continent needed not just a new organization capable of addressing the challenges but one with the drive to accelerate the realization of Africa's development aspirations.³⁶

Since its formation, the AU has embarked on efforts to fulfil its mandate in three significant ways. First, it has translated its mandate and the continental vision for a prosperous and stable Africa into various legal and normative frameworks shaping Africa's efforts. Second, different institutional frameworks have been established to shape and guide steps towards realizing goals. In this effort, the AU has grown from its initial form and institutional structure into an organization with a wide-reaching institutional infrastructure for addressing Africa's challenges. Finally, the organization has taken actions within the framework of existing legal and institutional frameworks towards the realization of its aspirations around peace and security, economic stability, and the projection of Africa's agency in its dealings with the rest of the world.

In these efforts, the development of the Agenda 2063 blueprint and masterplan has been a significant milestone in transforming Africa into "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena." In pursuing its goals over the last two decades of its existence, the AU has registered gains in developing considerable agency in shaping multilateral actions within Africa and amplifying Africa's voice on the global stage. It has also made notable progress in facilitating the fulfilment of continental trade goals through establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), championing continental peace and security efforts, and establishing norms for good governance, human rights, and political stability, among others.

The AU has, thus, succeeded in establishing itself as a normal entrepreneur and an indispensable interlocutor in the collective efforts to achieve a prosperous and peaceful Africa. Despite the notable progress, however, Africa continues to grapple with numerous challenges, particularly around peace and security, due to the context within which the continental body operates and various inherent weaknesses in the form of the

³⁴ Agenda 2063, 2013. E-source: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/outcomes>.

³⁵ Constitutive Act of the AU, 2001.

³⁶ Institute for Security Studies, 2022.

organization itself. The AU has, thus, faced numerous challenges, including evident contradictions in its approach to dealing with unconstitutional changes of governments (UCGs); challenges in translating normative and legal frameworks into action; a widening funding gap; and challenges in coordinating responses to challenges such as terrorism, violent extremism, and transnational organized criminal activities.

THE STATUS OF THE SDGS IMPLEMENTATION IN AFRICA

The international community adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the September 2015. This is an agenda that considers human advancement as a nexus and combination of inclusive social, economic development and environmental sustainability. The 2030 global development agenda views development as a collective responsibility that addresses the interests of all nations by upholding the fundamental principles of human dignity, shared prosperity, and global equity.³⁷ The SDGs are an action plan for people, planet, peace, prosperity, and partnership that reflect the core values encapsulated in the African Union charter and the Charter of the United Nations. The SDGs that are focused on the sustainability of development anchored on social, economic, and environmental pillars has 17 Goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators.³⁸

The SDGs' achievement calls for the interdependence of domestic and international policymaking, which reinforces the imperative of global public goods as a key strategy of continental and global development management. Their adoption came at an inflexion point for Africa. The resounding high economic growth of the past 15 years of about 5.0 percent, which ranked Africa as the second-fastest growing region, after Asia, had started to decline – it was put at 2.2 percent for 2016, the lowest during the period³⁹. A dip in international commodity prices has seriously affected growth with attendant fiscal and macroeconomic pressures.

Today, Africa's development is threatened by multiple crises. The situation of the continent is “distinctly different from past episodes, first in the increased frequency of crises, as well as the persistence and deepening of climate and conflict crises”.⁴⁰ While in 2008/2009 Africa used debt to weather the financial crisis, today, “rapidly rising global interest rates and the absence of a well-functioning framework for comprehensive debt reduction and relief, threaten to cut access to international financial markets for many countries”.⁴¹ In view of these challenges, are the SDGs still essential for Africa? The simple answer to this question is yes for several reasons.

First, the SDGs provide the best global framework that Africa can utilize to close gaps between its own development and the rest of the world. Africa is one of the developing regions considerably below world averages on key development outcomes and indicators, particularly those relating to levels of poverty, inequality, and hunger; access to quality health and education, water, and sanitation; levels of industrialization and infrastructure; access to modern energy; and progress on development of ecosystems – including climate change and biodiversity. Working towards convergence on these indicators is therefore an imperative if the goal of ‘leaving no one behind’ is to be achieved.

Second, the SDGs are a social contract between African governments and the governed. They do not only seek equal treatment of the unequal, but also commit to leaving no one behind on the development spectrum by 2030 through eradication of extreme poverty and substantial reduction of all forms of exclusion – an objective that resonates with the aspirations of the African Union Agenda 2063. The objective of the SDGs is to reach the last milestone of marginalization and exclusion, arguing that the focus of development should be on marginalized people in hard-to-reach communities, on vulnerable groups like children, women, and youth, on slum dwellers and on internally displaced people or victims of natural disasters.

Third, developments in Africa have a strong impact on the world's ability to achieve the SDGs. Reviewing the experience of working towards achieving the MDGs on the continent, Africa shaped the dynamics of the

³⁷ The Sustainable Development Goals, 2015.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ AfDB, OECD and UNDP, 2017.

⁴⁰ Brookings Institute, 2023, p.10.

⁴¹ Ibid.

achievements on this previous agenda. Africa's poor performance in some Goals, especially poverty, dragged down global progress. Judging from that evidence, Africa holds the key to real progress on the SDGs over the next 7 years. It is in Africa's interest to ensure the Continent positively drives the progress of the SDGs globally, which hinges on the extent to which the international community supports the continent in shaping the contours of the development agenda in Africa. In this regard, it is in the interest of both Africa and the international community to partner, cooperate and collaborate towards the success of the 2030 Agenda in Africa.

Fourth, the Achievement of the SDGs calls for African solidarity in driving continental progress and development. No individual or isolated policies and programmes remedy and address cross-boundary, continental and global challenges (such as terrorism, armed conflicts, infectious communicable diseases such as Ebola, and climate change threats) and opportunities like regional integration, globalization, climate change adaptation, and global public goods.⁴² Goals relating to stable climate, sustainable consumption and production, global health, and peace and security, among others, require collective, coordinated actions and integrated partnerships within and outside countries – including government, CSOs, private sector, foundations, and international organization – with each leveraging its comparative advantages and strengths to achieve synergy and better development results. The SDGs, a global agenda with national appeal, require integrated and collective actions to achieve effective implementation.⁴³

Fifth, the implementation of the SDGs reintroduces the imperatives of development planning towards managing development outcomes: In most African countries, development often occurs in silos – as opposed to occurring in a manner interlinked among economic, social, and the environment towards creating pathways for inclusive and sustainable development. The resurgence of development planning – after it was violently decimated by the 'Washington Consensus' through Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s and 1990s – builds on adherence to a plan-budget link anchored to result-based budgeting, which is central to implementing the SDGs in Africa. The SDGs, therefore, provide the framework for rekindling development planning as an instrument for managing national and continental development.

Sixth, the diverse and varied global interests in Africa present a myriad of opportunities for Africa's unified position in implementing the SDGs. Almost all regions of the world, overtly or covertly, are interested in Africa for various reasons. To begin with, the interest of some groups hinge on the abundance of natural resources, which the groups want to maximize to invigorate their economic transformation and sustenance. Also, in the face of aging populations across developed and developing regions (Europe, Asia, and Latin America), Africa is the most youthful continent estimated to contribute about 83 percent of the world's net population change by 2021.⁴⁴

This youthful population constitutes a potential asset in lubricating economies of the rest of the world, either in the form of production or consumption.⁴⁵ Also, being home to about 60 percent of uncultivated arable land globally, Africa could become the powerhouse of global food security and for promoting a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) to reduce carbon footprints.⁴⁶ Last, as the continent with the largest number of countries (e.g. 28% of UN membership), the SDGs have become an important asset for political support. It was, therefore, Africa's interest for its members to develop a unified position to achieve sustainable development on the continent, ensuring that international cooperation and partnerships would be used to maximize the promised benefits of any global development. This was the singular reason for which the continent formulated its Agenda 2063 prior to the formulation of the SDGs as a successor to the MDGs.

The period of the MDGs, focusing attention only on developing countries, particularly those in Africa, with limited attention to high income countries – except when allocating ODA – is over. During this era, the responsibility for implementing the MDGs was viewed as that of the developing world. In contrast, the SDGs, being a universal agenda, require actions from poor and rich countries to achieve its objectives. There are

⁴² Kaydor, 2022.

⁴³ Ibid.

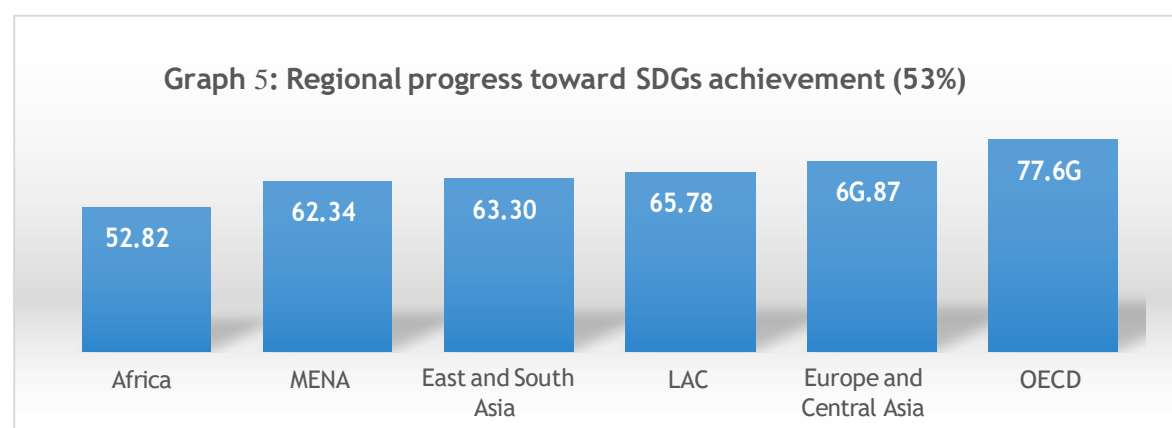
⁴⁴ Odusola, et al, 2017a.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Odusola, 2014.

multiple actions of advanced economies that weaken the ability of developing countries, especially low- income countries, to implement the SDGs.

Some of these actions of developed countries produce negative spillover effects on Africa’s capacity to deliver on the SDGs, including unsustainable consumption and production levels, carbon emissions, tax havens, a financial system that accepts illicit financial flows, weapons exports, restrictions on remittances, hiking of rates of remittances, restrictions to market access, currency adjustments, and trade liberalization. Each of these actions weaken the capacity of Africa to manage its economies and deliver on the SDGs. Most countries, in the developed world, which generate high negative spillover effects, boast high per capita incomes and higher prospects to achieve the SDGs for themselves.⁴⁷ The SDGs have, therefore, brought these countervailing actions of wealthy countries under global scrutiny. Below is an indication of the spillover effects based on the 2022 sustainable development report.⁴⁸



Source: BS and SDSN 2017 Report

Note: MENA=Middle East and North Africa, LAC=Latin America and the Caribbean, and OECD=Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development.

In view of the foregoing, achieving the SDGs in Africa is an imperative for the global sustainable development agenda. This called for the alignment between the global development Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union’s Agenda 2063. This was why the Common African Position sought the alignment of both agendas at about 90 percent.⁴⁹ As such, Africa’s development priorities and aspirations in the Agenda 2063 are synonymous to executing the D i s b a r r i n g in mind Africa’s t h e n trailblazing economic growth f r o m 2000, one would have expected sturdy progress on the SDGs as well.

Even so, progress on the SDGs is not as strong as those recorded on economic growth. By the close of 2017, Africa’s progress towards the achieving of the SDGs still lagged behind other regions whereby Africa was behind the OECD performance by 24.9 percentage points compared to the Middle East and North Africa (15.4), East and South Asia (14.4), Latin America and the Caribbean (11.9) and Europe and Central Asia (7.9), and no African country made the list of the best 50 countries on progress towards the SDGs (see figure 3).⁵⁰

From 2017 to 2019, gradual progress was being made, but the advent of the COVID- 19 as well as the Russian invasion of Ukraine changed global dynamics. Therefore, the slow progress towards achieving the SDGs is further challenged as clearly indicated in the 2022 sustainable development report, which states that:

“Peace, diplomacy, and international cooperation are fundamental conditions for the world to progress on the SDGs towards 2030 and beyond. The war in Ukraine and other military conflicts are humanitarian tragedies. They also impact prosperity and social outcomes through the rest of the world, including exacerbating poverty,

⁴⁷ BS and SDSN, 2017.

⁴⁸ Sachs, Lafortune, Kroll, Fuller, and Woelm, 2022, P.IX.

⁴⁹ Common African Position on Post 2015 Development Agenda, 2015.

⁵⁰ BS and SDSN, 2017.

food insecurity, and access to affordable energy. The climate and biodiversity crises amplify the impact of these crises. At the time of this writing in early May 2022, the outcome of the war in Ukraine and other military conflicts, but also of the health crisis, remain highly uncertain.

Yet, these multiple and simultaneous crises have diverted policy attention and priorities away from medium and long-term goals such as the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement: a shift of focus towards short-term issues that threatens to slow down or even stall the adoption of ambitious and credible national and international plans but also squeezes available international funding for sustainable development.

Global cooperation and commitment to the bedrock SDG principles of social inclusion, clean energy, responsible consumption, and universal access to public services are needed more than ever to respond to the major challenges of our times, including security crises, pandemics, and climate change. Despite these difficult times, the SDGs should remain the roadmap for achieving sustainable development by 2030 and beyond.

For the second year in a row, the world is no longer making progress on the SDGs. The average SDG Index score slightly declined in 2021, partly due to slow or nonexistent recovery in poor and vulnerable countries. Multiple and overlapping health and security crises have led to a reversal in SDG progress. Performance on SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) remains below pre-pandemic levels in many low-income countries (LICs) and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs).

This is a major setback, especially considering that before the pandemic, over the period 2015–2019, the world was progressing on the SDGs at a rate of 0.5 points per year (which was also too slow to reach the 2030 deadline), with poorer countries making greater gains than rich countries. Progress on climate and biodiversity goals is also too slow, especially in rich countries. Ahead of the heads of state SDG Summit in 2023, restoring and accelerating SDG progress in all countries, including the poorest and most vulnerable, should be a major priority of recovery plans and reforms to the international development finance system”.⁵¹

CONCLUSION

Drawing from the foregoing gloomy picture painted by the 2022 sustainable development report, it is important for African states to deepen peace, diplomacy, and international cooperation to make significant progress towards the achievement of the SDGs as well as the continent's own Agenda 2063. Without peace and security on the continent, progress towards reduction of extreme poverty will be stalled. Therefore, the African Union Commission needs to advance innovative diplomatic international cooperation measures that will enhance peace, security, economic growth, and regional development. Without peace and security, the continent will not be stable; without stability, the continent might not grow its economy, and without economic growth, there will be no means to pursue regional sustainable development. Therefore, the African Union must strive for peace, security, and stability. The states need to invest in the vulnerable populations on the continent to ensure peace and stability.

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