

Preface

Africa: Pathways and Crossroads

Introduction

When we at the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) decided to reflect in a high-level symposium on the 20 years of the African Union (AU), it was with genuine understanding that in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, it was clear that Africa was at a crossroads. The continent could advance, having prevailed over the pandemic and its ramifications, or it could be stuck in a downward spiral of low growth, arrested development, and shattered expectations. It was clear that the 20 years had set out clear pathways for achieving a prosperous Africa. This was evident in the decisions of the AU, including the adoption of Agenda 2063 with the tagline 'The Africa We Want'. Yet the difficulties worsened by the pandemic were such that the continent was on the edge.

The AU's Agenda 2063 represents a strategic framework aimed at transforming Africa into a global powerhouse over 50 years. Adopted in 2013, this agenda envisions an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa driven by its citizens and capable of playing a prominent role in global affairs. While Agenda 2063 offers a comprehensive roadmap for sustainable development, its realisation faces numerous challenges. The following key obstacles, including governance deficits, economic challenges, security threats, and climate change, could impede Africa's progress toward achieving this ambitious vision.

Institutional Deficits

Sound governance and strong institutions are critical for sustainable development, but many African countries struggle with governance deficits. Corruption, lack of transparency, and inadequate accountability mechanisms hinder effective policy

implementation and erode citizens' trust in public institutions. For instance, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index has consistently shown high levels of corruption in many African nations.¹ Poor governance practices weaken public service delivery, impede economic growth, and discourage foreign investment. Institutional weaknesses also extend to the enforcement of laws, making it difficult to tackle issues like human rights abuse and social inequalities.²

Inequality

Africa's economic potential is substantial, with a young and growing labor force, vast natural resources, and emerging markets. However, persistent economic challenges continue to impede the continent's growth. High poverty levels, income inequality, and unemployment, especially among the young, are prevalent across the continent. According to the African Development Bank (AfDB), youth unemployment was nearly twice the global average before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the economic shock that resulted from the pandemic exacerbated this challenge.³ It has grown since. Moreover, Africa's heavy reliance on commodity exports makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in global prices, undermining economic stability and development efforts. With a growing appetite for rare minerals used for digital technologies and renewable energy tools, Africa risks sinking deeper into this economic dependency. To meet the goals of Agenda 2063, African countries know they must diversify their economies, invest in manufacturing, and promote inclusive growth. Yet this has not happened. This is a crisis of leadership, and a failure of citizens, too.

1 Amnesty International. (2021). Corruption Perception Index. Available at <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021>.

2 United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (2018). African Governance Report. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36843-doc-aga_report_-_english_-_online.pdf

3 African Development Bank. (2020). African Economic Outlook 2020. AfDB.

Insecurity

Security threats and conflict pose significant obstacles to Africa's progress. The persistence of armed conflicts, insurgencies, and terrorism destabilises regions, disrupts development initiatives, and leads to humanitarian crises. For instance, extremist groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabaab in Somalia have caused widespread violence, displacement, and loss of life. The low-intensity wars in various countries and the return of coups also add to instability. This insecurity hampers trade, investment, and development. The African Union's Peace and Security Council has taken steps to address conflicts. Still, challenges such as weak peacekeeping capabilities, limited funding, and complex socio-political dynamics often undermine efforts to establish lasting peace.⁴ But insecurity continues unabated.

Climate and Environmental Crises

Africa is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which pose severe risks to livelihoods, food security, and health. Rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events threaten agricultural productivity, upon which much of the continent's population depends.⁵ Desertification, deforestation, and water scarcity further exacerbate these challenges, intensifying resource competition and fueling conflicts. Addressing climate change is essential for achieving the aspirations of Agenda 2063, but many African countries lack the financial and technological resources to adapt and mitigate its impacts. Global co-operation and increased investment in sustainable energy and climate-resilient infrastructure are critical to overcoming this challenge.⁶

4 The AU Peace Fund was established to address key financial challenges associated with peacebuilding efforts.

5 IPCC. (2019). Special Report on Climate Change and Land. Geneva.

6 See United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (2020). "Building Climate Resilient Economies in Africa." UNECA.

Inadequate Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure gaps in energy, transportation, and digital connectivity impede Africa's socio-economic transformation. Reliable infrastructure is crucial for promoting trade, attracting investment, and improving access to essential services like healthcare and education. However, many African countries face significant infrastructure deficits due to limited public resources and high costs of construction. The African Union's Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) aims to address these gaps, but financing remains challenging.⁷ Additionally, inadequate infrastructure undermines regional integration efforts, making it difficult for countries to fully benefit from initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Digital Divide and Marginalisation

The continent benefits from participation in the digital transformation that has hit the world. The new technologies, including artificial intelligence and robotics, promise to revolutionise economies, improve efficiency, increase economic participation, and improve social and human development. Africa has identified this as a huge opportunity. But without massive investment in data infrastructure, technology development, and acquisition, this dream would be deferred.

Conclusion

Africa's pathway is evident in Agenda 2063, but the continental blueprint for Africa's socio-economic transformation is in jeopardy. While Agenda 2063 envisions a brighter future for Africa, achieving its goals requires addressing a range of complex challenges. Good governance, economic diversification, security, climate resilience, and infrastructural development are essential pillars for realising the agenda's transformative vision. Success will depend not only on strong leadership and regional co-operation, but also on the mobilisation of global partnerships and

⁷ See African Union Commission. (2019). "Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA)." African Union.

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investment. By overcoming these obstacles, Africa can harness its immense potential and build a sustainable and prosperous future for its people.

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