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Towards the second decade of Agenda 2063: Embracing a resilient social contract with African citizens

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Abstract

The first ten-year implementation plan (FTYIP) of Agenda 2063: The Africa we want drew to a close this year. Member states of the African Union and the AU institutions, led by the AU Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) as well as the AU Commission (AUC), have worked closely and collaboratively over the past five years to galvanise implementation of the plan. Empirical findings of continental reporting concerning the aims of Agenda 2063 revealed some progress towards implementing most of its aspirations, particularly as regards improving governance and promoting the rule of law in Africa. This commentary paper argues that African leaders and organs need to embrace Agenda 2063 as a *social contract* between African citizens, leaders and AU organs if the aspirations of Agenda 2063 are to be achieved.

Keywords: Agenda 2063, sustainable development, social contract

Agenda 2063 rationale, aspirations and modus operandi

Agenda 2063: The Africa we want was adopted during the 24th Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, in Addis Ababa, January 2013, under Assembly/AU/Dec.565 (XXIV). The agenda advocates for stronger socio-economic and political integration among African countries and sets out measures to achieve these through seven aspirations and 20 specific goals, as well as a number of continental flagship programmes and therefore represents an important milestone in the history of African unity.

Agenda 2063 envisages the continent as an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena. The broad aims of continental integration and economic prosperity are expressed in terms of these aspirations and associated goals. Specifically, the goals aim to address poverty reduction and promote economic prosperity, health, education and access to markets, among other socio-economic essentials for African citizens, and achieving them clearly requires interlinked approaches and plans.

Other aspirations and goals focus on preserving peace and security, promoting good governance and supporting the rule of law alongside nurturing Africa's culture and heritage, empowering youth and women, and boosting Africa's potential as a global actor. The 15 flagship programmes adopted to support Agenda 2063 were specifically formulated to complement national efforts to boost these goals and aspirations. In outline, the flagship programmes aim to galvanise continental cooperation towards free trade between African countries, as well as develop regional infrastructure and electricity programmes, create AU financial institutions, encourage free movement of African citizens, and establish a pan-African university.

Agenda 2063 aspirations

- A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.

- An integrated continent, politically united, based on the ideals of pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance.

- An Africa of good governance, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.

- A peaceful and secure Africa.

- An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics.

- An Africa whose development is people driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.

- Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner.

Flagship programmes of Agenda 2063

- African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)
- African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network
- Pan-African E-Network
- African Commodities Strategy
- Pan African Virtual and E-University
- Grand Inga Dam Project
- Single African Air Transport Market
- African Passport and Free Movement of People
- Silencing the Guns by 2020
- The African Economic Platform (AEP)
- African Outer Space Strategy
- Cyber-security
- Encyclopaedia Africana
- The Great Museum of Africa (GMA)
- African Financial Institutions

Most Agenda 2063 goals have strong alignment with Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which was endorsed by the United Nations in 2015, and called for economic prosperity and protection of the planet while centralising governance, peace and partnerships to accelerate the

17 global SDGs. To operationalise Agenda 2063, the AU Commission, working with member states, adopted five 10-year implementation plans, with the first plan starting from 2013-2023 and ending in 2063. The FTYIPs provide overall guidance of the goals associated with the aspirations, as well as the key flagship projects.

Agenda 2063 proposes that coordination among various actors at a range of intuitional levels should be the central factor required to achieve its aspirations and goals. More specifically, it proposes that actors at the continental, subregional and national levels need to engage with each other effectively to realise its aims. According to this vision, AU organs, financial institutions and national country institutions need to collaborate in planning, implementation and monitoring efforts to realise the aspirations, goals and programmes of Agenda 2063. Over the past 10 years, coordination and coherence of policies and implementation of programmes among AU organs with strategic partners, such as AU member states and non-state actors, including civil society, youth, and women's groups, has proved to be imperative for transforming the Agenda's aspirations and goals into specific actions. (Figure 1 below sets out the role expected of each of these actors.)

Figure 1: Key actors involved in Agenda 2063. Source: Author.
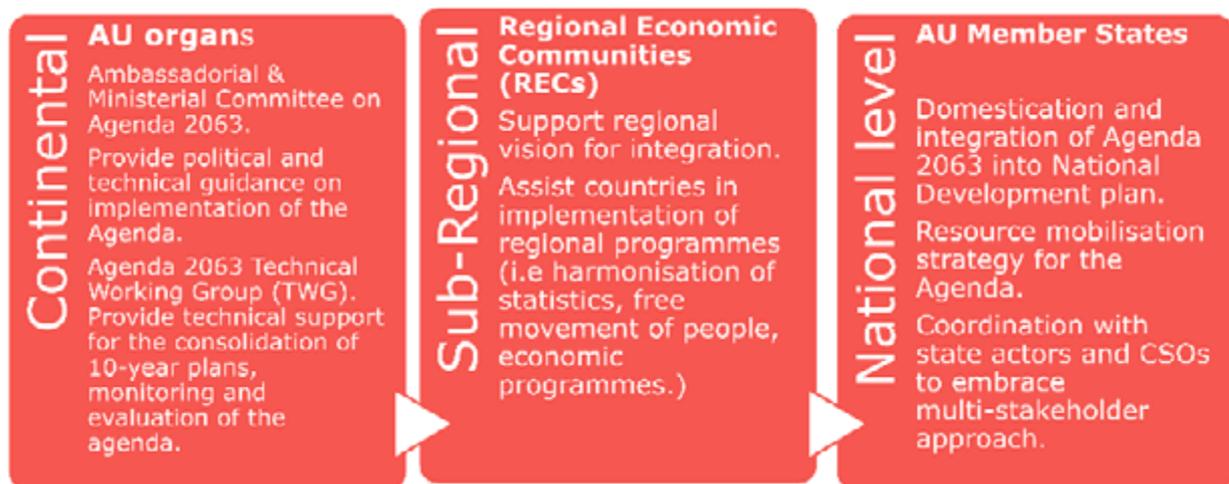
FTYIP of Agenda 2063: A decade of consequent challenges and humble achievements

Having noted this, the 2022/2023 continental assessment of Agenda 2063 concludes that although execution of the FTYIP has resulted in relatively humble achievements, it has also led to the persistence of a range of challenges. Many countries achieved only weak progress towards eradicating poverty, especially in the past three years, for example; this was mainly due to the negative consequences of Covid-19 on African economies, although other structural issues persisted in contributing to this. Overall, Africa registered an increase in the proportion of its population living below the poverty line[1]; on average, poverty across the continent rose from 33,3% in 2013 to 38% in 2023 (AUDA)-Nepad, forthcoming 2023).

The issue of poverty in Africa does not only involve the sheer numbers of people pushed under the poverty line; it must also be understood as involving a factor of intensity, particularly in specific rural areas across the continent. According to the Multi-dimensional Poverty Assessment, led by the Oxford

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[1] The poverty line is internationally defined as referring to citizens who live below $2.15 a day to meet their basic needs.

Human Development Initiative (OPHI), there are 35 regions in Africa where 90% of people or more are poor, and 116 regions where 80% of people or more are poor. More than 220 million poor people live in these regions of high concentration of poverty, accounting for more than a third of Africa's poor (OPHI, 2021).

Figure 2: Progress towards Agenda 2063 aspirations (AUDA-Nepad, 2022).

However, it is somewhat encouraging to record that access to electricity, safe drinking water and sanitation facilities saw an upward trend over the FTYIP period. The findings of national reports indicate that the overall percentage of households with access to electricity increased considerably from 42% to 62%. These figures were not near the FTYIP target value of 77% because countries vary widely concerning financial and human resources to support these sectors. However, some countries, notably, Kenya, Togo and Sierra Leone, were able to register positive moves in these areas, based on national investments and dedicated plans to improve basic services for citizens.

The continent has had some success in accelerating the ratification and operationalisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Intra-trade between African countries is also progressing. However, the small contribution of manufacturing to Africa's annual GDP and hence to job creation is cause for concern, especially when compared to the targets set for this goal, including improving income per capita and reduction of the unemployment rate to below 11%.

Recent statistics give a mixed picture concerning promotion of good governance and sustaining peace and security across the continent. While heavy investment and financial pledges have been dedicated to realising both goals, overall performance in relation to aspiration three (good governance) only recorded 42% against all goals and targets set. Furthermore, the second continental report of Agenda 2063 noted that 31% of people believe that mechanisms and oversight institutions to hold leaders accountable are effective, up from 19% recorded in 2013.

African countries and their leaders are increasingly trying to adhere to AU standards and codes.

This includes the domestication of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance for improving the regularity of elections, access to information and freedoms. In particular, AU specialised organs, such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and African Governance Architecture (AGA), urge countries to improve inclusiveness in the adopted electoral democracies and overall decision-making process.

The prevailing levels of corruption and a general lack of accountable civil services remain major challenges for African countries. According to national reports, the proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and paid a bribe, or were asked for a bribe by these public officials, remains high.

Despite the strong connections of relevance between Agenda 2063 and national development plans (NDPs) and visions, the effectiveness of Agenda 2063 implementation is uneven. The agenda has shown itself to be highly relevant to African national plans, especially with priorities pertinent to health, education and economic growth. Nevertheless, many of the national programmes and projects that have been adopted are more aligned with the SDGs. About 25 out of the FTYIP's total of 60 indicators performed negatively or weakly during the period under review.

Furthermore, civil servants, executives, youth, media and CSOs are less aware of Agenda 2063 compared to their level of engagement with the global 2030 Agenda (African Peer Review Mechanism [APRM], 2023). According to APRM continental consultations with different experts and CSOs, it is recommended that the AU act more systematically at national level with member states and non-state actors to achieve the same visibility and citizens' engagement for Agenda 2063 as the UN SDGs already enjoy (APRM, 2023).

Second ten-year implementation plan: Accelerating Agenda 2063 through building resilient and agile societies and institutions

Moving forward, the second ten-year implementation plan (STYIP), as consolidated by the AU Commission and AUDA-Nepad, aims to build on the goals of the previous plan while emphasising moonshots and enablers to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 2063 during the second decade (2023-2033). In preparation and drafting the STYIP, the AU Technical working group (consisting of AUC, AUDA-Nepad, APRM, the African Development Bank (AfDB), UNDP and UNICEF) contributed to drafting the referred plan. This was implemented in collaboration with Agenda 2063 focal points in key ministries at a national level in the 55 member states. The consultative process has also kept in mind that further attention should be paid to the African context and priorities while taking into consideration the recent re-emergence of concerning political complexities in the African context, such as intra-conflicts and coups d'état.

The STYIP revealed a number of themes as key priorities, including accelerating economic growth, closing the digitalisation divide gap in Africa, enhancing digitalisation literacy and skills, achieving greater gender parity, fostering resilience and preparedness to shocks, especially in the context of post-Covid 19 recovery plans, and capitalising on the youth bulge to address political and societal transformation on the continent.

Figure 3: Moonshots of Agenda 2063 (2023-2033). Source: AU Commission, 2023
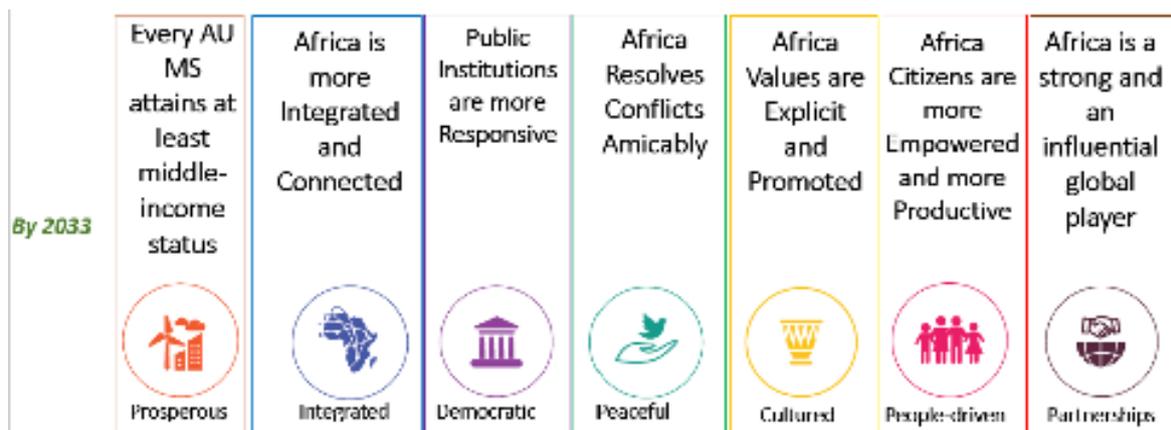
If the STYIP is to become more relevant and impactful for AU countries, it will need to conceptualise Agenda 2063 as a "social contract" between African leaders, government institutions and citizens, including youth and females, as well as the private sector. This should address the concerns expressed by various continental reports, meetings, focus group discussions and workshops concerning the widespread lack of citizen awareness of Agenda 2063. It goes hand in hand with issues pertinent to financing the agenda and practising political ownership to implement it by African presidents and senior officials. In other words, citizens and executives should acquire sufficient understanding of the extent to which this continental agenda is useful for national priorities.

The social contract is defined as the "entirety of explicit or implicit agreements between all relevant societal groups and the sovereign (i.e., the government or any other actor in power), defining their rights and obligations towards each other" (Loewe, Trautner & Zintl, 2021, p.3). Practically speaking, the concept of the social contract is important and relevant to reconceiving the way African countries approach addressing the Agenda 2063 aspirations and targets because it focuses our attention on the nature and quality of the relationship between the state and society.

Scholars argue that a social contract can offer a useful lens for thinking about issues of political transition, especially in postcolonial Africa, where political regimes often struggle with fragility and instability. The concept of the social contract urges the view that it is a central function of the state to meet citizens' requirements and demands in a range of areas (see below).

Figure 4: Parties of a social contract (Source: DIE, 2019)
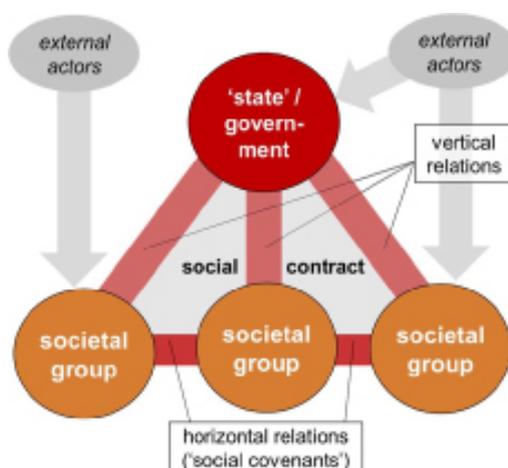
Further, national contexts going through political transitions offer a wealth of possibilities for reimaging, reinventing and manifesting new social contracts between state and society, and groups within society that hold promise for inclusive peace and development (McCandless et al, 2019, p.92). It is worth noting that conceptualising the relationship between state and citizenry as a social contract also has implications for how we understand political unrest and unconstitutional changes of government. It is my opinion that there has been an upward trend in these in Africa since 2015.

Social contract theory posits that the relationship between the state and the citizenry should be conceptualised as a kind of agreement between them that outlines key functions of the state in relation to the aspirations, needs and demands of citizens in a number of key areas (Loewe, Trautner & Zintl, 2019). These can be usefully categorised as three Ps:

Protection
This may include collective security against external threats; individual security against physical threats, such as alleged or real terrorist threats from non-state actors, criminal acts or acts of state arbitrariness; and sometimes even legal security, such as the enforcement of human and civil rights.

Provision of basic services Access to resources, infrastructure, social services (e.g. health and education), social protection and economic opportunities.

Participation
Involvement of various elements of society in political decision-making processes on different levels.

Arguably, the core elements of the social contract as expressed above are highly relevant to our understanding of the aspirations and goals of Agenda 2063. This would be the case especially with regard to aspirations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 as discussed earlier. However, reporting on continental progress on Agenda 2063 as executed by the AU Commission and technical working group of Agenda 2063 concluded that the aspirations and targets of Agenda 2063 have not been well articulated or communicated to African citizens, and particularly the continent's youth. From the reports it is clear that this is mainly due to the lack of AU visibility at national level and a lack of communication channels to convey them effectively to populations around the continent.

Figure 5: Deliverables in the social contract. Source: Loewe et al (2019)

A particular advantage of social contract theory is that it provides models for understanding the relationships between different societal groups that represent associations of citizens and their rights and provisions and that it can therefore also provide models for understanding how they can collaborate effectively in demanding and protecting these rights and provisions.

If the AU institutions hope to raise greater awareness of and achieve better domestication of the 2063 agenda, it will help to conceptualise its key deliverables in terms of social contract theory. The Agenda's deliverables aim to develop standards and norms for AU countries in achieving a range of targets in the areas of human rights, strengthening citizen engagement and political participation in decision-making. Furthermore, thinking about state activity as a matter of a social contract with citizens also clarifies why governments should be held accountable as regards providing basic services and galvanising economic opportunity. In both cases, social contract theory envisages an active relationship between state and citizen that sets requirements and even obligations for government.

Affective development of the STYIP on the basis of social contract theory will acknowledge these factors, propose plans for integrating the developmental approach, strengthen coordination and coherence amongst national authorities and the AU organs, and propose concrete measures to achieve this.

In conclusion, this commentary article has argued that the AU institutions and member states need to revisit and reconceptualise the governance systems assumed by Agenda 2063 in terms of social contract theory. African leaders, political organisations and other non-state actors that claim to lead or provide for society need to recognise that they have obligations toward citizens in society that can be understood as a contract to represent them effectively, and to provide a range of protections and services. This approach can help to align NDPs with the Agenda by studying and developing new government approaches to tackling the implementation of the agenda in an inclusive manner, strengthening governance platforms to achieve this, and finally, setting appropriate indicators of progress that make its achievement meaningful and measurable.

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