Sustainable development

United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

ECA POLICY BRIEF

From the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063: Lessons for Africa

1. Background

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, 189 United Nations Member States and at least 22 international organizations committed to achieving eight international development goals – the Millennium Development Goals – by 2015. The eight Goals were largely founded on the eight chapters1 of the Millennium Declaration, themselves built around the need to strengthen observance of human rights, promoting good governance, peace and protection of the environment across the world.

The 15 years leading up to the target date generated important lessons for the adaptation and coordination of global development goals at the national level. As the date grew closer, global and regional development agencies as well as national governments and civil society engaged in a long consultative process designed to produce a successor framework. This process culminated in the 17 aspirational Sustainable

1 Values and principles (freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility); Peace, security and disarmament; Development and poverty eradication; Protecting our common environment; Human rights, democracy and good governance; Protecting the vulnerable; Meeting the special needs of Africa; and Strengthening the United Nations.

Development Goals (United Nations, 2015a) agreed to by 193 United Nations Member States, multilateral organizations and global civil society in September 2015. Africa influenced this process and the content of the Sustainable Development Goals by drawing up a Common African Position. The region also prepared its own long-term vision: the African Union's Agenda 2063, containing seven aspirations under the theme The Africa We Want. Agenda 2063 promises "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena" (African Union Commission, 2014). A key question is whether these global and regional development frameworks can trigger inclusive and sustained development in Africa, and what is required to trigger that development.

The momentum gained in implementing and tracking the Millennium Development Goals is critical to assessing the implementation and measurement of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. The broader coverage of the latter, greater buy-in by national governments and readiness by African countries to subscribe to them provide potential for their integration into national development plans and implementation. The Sustainable Development Goals are linked to Africa's Agenda 2063 for inclusive and sustainable development and transformation. The interlinkages noted in the planning for and implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, such as gender equality and empowerment of women and their wider implications for poverty reduction, child and maternal mortality and school enrolment, underscore the importance of these international development frameworks in influencing policy at national level.

This policy brief, derived from the MDGs-SDGs Transition Report 2016 by the ECA et al. (2016), summarizes some of the key achievements and lessons learned during implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and outlines policy options towards implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. It underscores that applying home-grown and participatory approaches, aligning the Sustainable Development Goals with Agenda 2063 and creating transparent and stronger institutions are crucial to the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063, as well as monitoring and reporting.

2. Progress and contributing factors

As the period covered by the Sustainable Development Goals began, Africa had made significant progress on at least five of the eight Millennium Development Goals. Strong progress was recorded on Goal 2, primary school enrolment; Goal 3, gender equality and empowerment of women; Goal 4, reducing child mortality; Goal 6, combating the spread of HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis and other diseases; and Goal 7, ensuring environmental sustainability. But eradicating extreme hunger and poverty (Goal 1) has remained elusive, with reversals in some countries; maternal deaths (Goal 5) have declined, but the levels remain unacceptably high across Africa; and the task of strengthening a partnership for development is still a work in progress, with large unmet overseas development assistance commitments and the persistently low share of Africa in global trade.

Mechanisms for coordination, implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and reporting on them have been developed, and most African countries have drawn up long-term visions with a focus on poverty eradication, mass education and promoting health care.

Goal 1: Eradicating extreme hunger and poverty

Since 1990 Africa has made steady, albeit slow, progress in reducing poverty, with significant variations across countries and regions. Excluding North Africa, poverty2 declined to 42.8 per cent in 2012 from 56.9 per cent in 1990 (Beegle and others 2016). But progress was not sufficient to meet

the target, and Africa still accounts for the largest share of poor people globally. Special attention to poverty reduction efforts through the Millennium Development Goals, combined with favourable economic conditions and strong economic growth averaging 5 per cent between 2005 and 2014 (IMF, 2015), accounted for much of the progress recorded over the last decade.

Unemployment remains high, with large spatial, gender and age disparities across the continent. The overall unemployment rate is estimated at 12 per cent, with subregional levels at 8.2 per cent (Central Africa), 9.1 per cent (West Africa), 10.7 per cent (Eastern Africa), 13.9 per cent (North Africa) and 18.0 per cent (Southern Africa). Unemployment rates among women, especially in North Africa and among young people, are significantly higher, averaging about 20 per cent and 21.1 per cent respectively.

Rapid poverty reduction is hampered by overreliance on a few sectors for growth, limited skills, high unemployment rates and the lack of industries to absorb the large labour supply. Rapid population growth is a challenge to poverty reduction: despite the reduction in the proportion of people living in poverty, there are now almost 110 million more poor people in Africa excluding North Africa than in 1990 (Beegle and others 2016).

Structural transformation, which is given priority in both the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063, is more urgent than ever to reduce poverty and susceptibility to shocks. Measures to address unemployment in order to achieve the Sustainable Development targets on poverty and inequality, especially among young people and women, are equally urgent.

Goal 2: Achieving universal primary education

Access to primary education has improved significantly, but structural bottlenecks hamper learning and skills acquisition. In 2013, 9 out of 40 countries (22.5 per cent) with data achieved the target, while 19 others came close, with annual net enrolment rates of 80-94 per cent (figure 1). Because they started from high baselines in 1990, North African countries recorded marginal to moderate progress.

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2   Defined as the proportion of people living on less than $1.90 a day. The World Bank adjusted this figure from $1.25 per day to $1.90 per day (based on purchasing power parity) in 2011.

Figure 1: Progress towards net enrolment targets, 2013
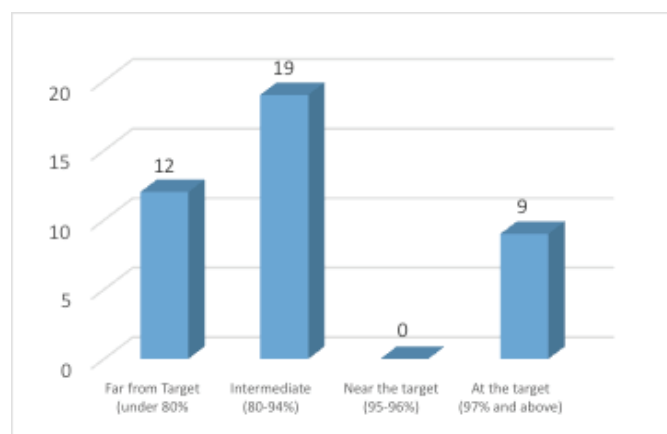
Source: UNECSO, 2015.

Progress in school enrolment was supported by increased public investment in primary education, implementation of policy frameworks promoting access to education opportunities, especially for underprivileged girls and children, and mobilization of civil society and development partners. Investment in school and road infrastructure, leading to more school places and reduced distances to school, had the largest impacts on access to education. On the demand side, school meal programmes, scholarships for girls, the abolition of school fees, cash transfers to poor households and curricula reforms contributed to the expansion of access to education.

Education in emergency situations is a priority. Disasters and persistent conflicts obstruct the path to prosperity, generating negative impacts, especially in the education sector. Ongoing conflicts in Central Africa and unfavourable weather conditions such as droughts and flooding in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa continue to exert pressure on food security and nutrition.

Alternative models to equitably reach vulnerable and marginalized groups are required. The implementation of policy frameworks under the Millennium Development Goals contributed to increasing access to education but did not succeed in equally providing high-quality education to all children regardless of their social situation. Many national plans and poverty reduction strategies did not have equity-based targets, and were not accompanied by sufficient allocation of resources, covering education for nomadic groups, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children in emergencies, working children, disabled children and those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Primary school completion rates have improved in most countries, but overall progress was insufficient to meet the target under the Millennium Development Goals. In 2013, 21.4 per cent of countries with data achieved the target of full completion in primary education; 11.9 per cent occupied an intermediate position (progress of at least 40 per cent) and 66.6 per cent were far from the target (below 40 per cent).

Poor-quality education in a number of African countries is a challenge to learning and skills acquisition. African countries perform poorly in international assessments of learning opportunities. In 2011, Morocco and Tunisia participated in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study and ranked 51st and 49th out of 52 participating countries in mathematics at fourth grade. The average availability of textbooks is particularly low in Africa excluding North Africa, at one handbook for three pupils in 2012.

Higher rates of literacy are critical to poverty alleviation. People with higher literacy skills have a lower probability of early death or a higher probability of migration. Possession of reading and writing skills is increasingly a prerequisite even for jobs demanding relatively low qualifications, and it remains a key lever for self-empowerment given the rapid expansion of communication technologies. However, progress towards reducing illiteracy has remained relatively slow. By 2012, 14 per cent of the 49 African countries with data had achieved universal literacy, 33 per cent were at the intermediate level (80-94 per cent literacy) and 51 per cent were still far from the target.

Goal 3: Promoting gender equality and empowering women

Progress in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women is strong. Gender gaps in net primary enrolment and completion rates have narrowed in many countries, and women's representation in parliaments has increased. By 2013, the continent's gender parity index averaged 96 girls for every 100 boys enrolled in primary school in 2013, up from 86 in the early 1990s; and 10 countries had achieved or surpassed the gender parity target. But gender parity at the secondary and tertiary levels remains a challenge owing to high dropout rates among girls, which are due to poverty, cultural norms that discriminate against girls, long distances to

schools, etc. Women's representation in key national positions, including cabinets and parliaments, is rising. By 2015 women's representation in national parliaments averaged 15.1 per cent, up from 9.1 per cent in 1990. Nevertheless, the continent remains below the 30 per cent target (figure 2).

Figure 2: Women's representation in national parliaments (per cent)
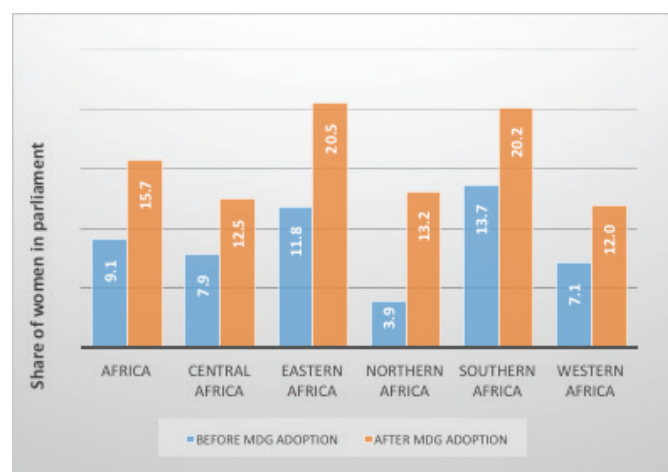
Source: United Nations Statistics Division, 2015.

Goal 3 offered an opportunity for governments to devise mechanisms to bridge gaps hindering the achievement of gender parity. Governments acknowledge the dividends of gender equality, including the spillover benefits in respect of other targets, reducing poverty, improving health and child welfare and raising school enrolment.

For many countries, increases in women's representation coincided with the rigorous implementation of gender-sensitive constitutional quotas (for example, in Algeria, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda). Improvements in educational attainment are also contributing to women's empowerment. The literacy gap between men and women declined from 10 to 6 percentage points in 2000 compared to 2012.

Goal 4: Reducing child mortality

Africa has witnessed unprecedented declines in child mortality. By 2015, under-five mortality in Africa excluding North Africa was estimated at 83 deaths per 1,000 children born alive, down from 180 per 1,000 in 1990. Between 1990–2000 and 2000–2010 the pace of decline in child mortality increased in 34 African countries. Under-five mortality declined

even more rapidly in North Africa, from 73 per 1,000 in 1990 to 24 per 1,000 in 2015 (figure 3). Similarly, infant mortality rates showed steep reductions in both North Africa and Africa excluding North Africa over the same period.

Figure 3: Child mortality rates by region
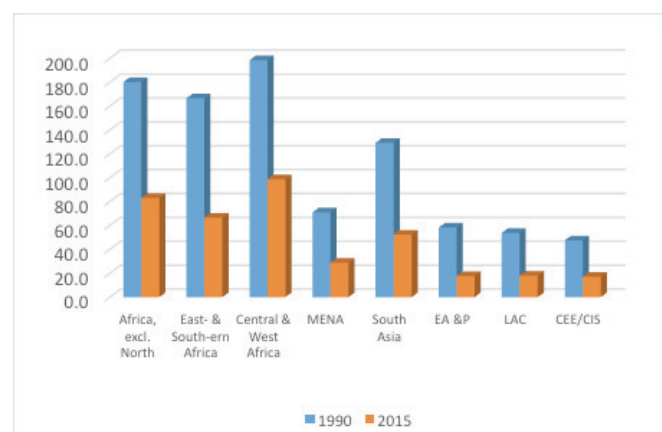
Source: United Nations Statistics Division, 2015.

Immunization and declining malaria deaths have been key to reducing child mortality. The biggest contributors to gains in child survival in Africa include increased immunization coverage and efforts to address malaria and other causes of child deaths (diarrhoea, pneumonia, etc.). Between 2000 and 2006, the coverage of the first-dose measles vaccine increased from 56 to 73 per cent, leading to a 91 per cent reduction in measles deaths. Reductions in malaria-related deaths accounted for 20 per cent of the decline in child mortality. Treatments for acute respiratory infections and diarrhoea, two of the biggest childhood killer diseases, improved considerably. Deploying community health workers to provide primary health care in rural areas in countries such as Ethiopia, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania contributed to increased access to basic health care including vaccination.

Reducing child (and maternal) mortality remains a global priority under the Sustainable Development Goals, and the momentum garnered during the Millennium Development Goals period must be sustained. In the coming years, as Africa's share of births increases, so will its share of the global burden of child mortality, predicted to rise to 60 per cent of the global deaths among under-five children.

Inequities in the reduction of child mortality have persisted over time. Reducing wealth and geographical disparities in the coverage of high-impact health interventions is critical towards accelerating reductions in child mortality. Multipronged approaches, such as upgrading human resources for health, improving the quality of clinical care and expanding community outreach services for child health, are needed. Interventions such as family planning for birth spacing, appropriate nutrition and hand-washing are highly effective in averting child (and maternal) deaths. These need to be applied more widely in Africa.

Goal 5: Improving maternal health

Progress in maternal mortality was recorded globally, but the target was not met.3 Between 1990 and 2015, Africa excluding North Africa recorded a 45 per cent reduction in maternal mortality, but still accounts for two thirds of all maternal deaths per year worldwide. Cabo Verde, Libya and Rwanda achieved the target of reducing maternal mortality ratio by three quarters, while North Africa recorded a 59 per cent reduction (WHO, 2015). Except for South Africa and Zimbabwe, the rest of Africa recorded reductions in this ratio. The rates of decline differ by country: at 1,360 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, Sierra Leone has the highest ration globally, and the figure is above 500 in 19 other African countries.

Access to skilled health workers, contraceptives and antenatal care reduces maternal deaths. Declines in maternal mortality rates can be attributed in part to improvements in the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel, in contraceptive prevalence rates and in antenatal care coverage. The proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel increased from 45 per cent to 71 per cent between 1990 and 2014, though this is still relatively low by global standards. Africa also increased the contraceptive prevalence rate from 28 per cent in 1990 to 43.6 per cent in 2013. Only Oceania has a lower rate. Antenatal care coverage with at least one visit also improved in all parts of Africa between 1990 and 2014.

The contraceptive prevalence rate among African countries increased to 43.6 per cent in 2013 (an

increase of 56 percentage points on the 1990 level of 28 per cent), but is still high by global standards. Africa has the highest level of unmet family planning needs, at 18 per cent. Antenatal care coverage (at least one visit) in all parts of Africa continued to improve, and by 2014, rates ranged from 72 per cent in Central and West Africa to 89 per cent in the East and North and 95 per cent in Southern Africa. Adolescent birth rates remain highest in Africa excluding North Africa, at 118 births per 1,000 adolescents.

Africa needs to invest more in measures to improve access to contraceptives, which is critical for child spacing and avoiding unwanted pregnancies.

Universal access to education and health services for adolescents will help to ensure that vulnerable people live to their full potential and contribute to economic growth.

Goal 6: Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

HIV incidence and prevalence rates declined faster during 2012-2013 than during the 11-year period 2001-2012. In Africa excluding North Africa, HIV/AIDS incidence and prevalence rates declined by 6.45 per cent and 2.2 per cent during 2012-2013 compared with about 5 per cent and 1.9 per cent during 2001-2012. No change was recorded in North Africa, where the incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS remained at 0.01 per cent and 0.1 per cent respectively.

Increased access to antiretroviral therapies contributed to the decline of HIV/AIDS. Between 2009 and 2011, access to these therapies in 14 African countries4 increased by at least 50 per cent, of which five5 had an increase of over 100 per cent. At least 22 African countries had antiretroviral therapy coverage exceeding 50 per cent; Botswana, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland and Zambia were the best performers, with coverage rates above 80 per cent.

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3 Globally, no region achieved the target of reducing maternal mortality by 75 per cent from the 1990 levels, and the reductions in maternal mortality differed substantially between regions.

4 Burundi, Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Egypt, Gambia, Liberia, Mauritius, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Togo, and Zimbabwe.
5 Egypt, Liberia, Gambia, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe.

Mixed progress was recorded in combating malaria and tuberculosis. Overall, the incidence of malaria declined by 6 per cent during 2000-2013, but there was a slight increase of 1.3 per cent between 2013 and 2015, reflecting a slackening in efforts against the disease. More positively, malaria-related deaths declined by almost 30 per cent between 2013 and 2015 (27 per cent in landlocked countries). Unfortunately, the gains in tuberculosis have been reversed in recent years. The incidence, prevalence and death rate associated with tuberculosis increased by 10.6 per cent, 0.3 per cent and 59.3 per cent respectively during 2012-2013, a major reversal from the declines of 26.3 per cent, 20.0 per cent and 54.2 per cent witnessed during 2002-2012.

Goal 7: Ensuring environmental sustainability

Carbon dioxide emissions in Africa are low but rising. Africa's carbon dioxide emissions are negligible compared to the rest of the world, and Gabon and Libya have substantially decreased their emissions. But over half of African countries experienced an increase in CO_2 emissions. Equatorial Guinea recorded the largest increase in CO_2 emissions, of 9 tons per capita. The majority of the emissions emanate from changes in land use.

A decreasing trend in consumption of ozone-depleting substances is noted in Africa. African countries have been successful in reducing their consumption of ozone-depleting substances and complying with the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. With the notable exception of Botswana, Gabon, Madagascar and Mauritania, all other African countries reduced their use of ozone-depleting substances between 2000 and 2013

Progress in expanding access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation was distinctly slow. Even though all African countries except Algeria recorded improvements in access to safe drinking water, the continent did not achieve the target.6

Excluding North Africa, Africa missed the target of increased access to improved sanitation.7 The

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6 Globally, this target was met five years ahead of schedule and exceeded the 2015 MDG Target of 88 per cent (United Nations, 2015b).
7 The Caucasus and Central Asia, East Asia, North Africa and West Asia were the only developing regions that met the sanitation target (UNICEF, WHO, 2015).

proportion of households with access to sanitation facilities increased marginally from 24 per cent in 1990 to 30 per cent in 2015. Out of 51 African countries with data available for 2015, 36 countries recorded coverage in improved sanitation facilities below 50 per cent.

Africa experienced a decrease in the proportion of slum dwellers among the urban population, from 70 per cent in 1990 to 65 per cent in 2000 and 55.2 per cent in 2014. However, Africa excluding North Africa remains the region with the highest prevalence of slums globally.

Goal 8: Developing a global partnership for development

Developing strong partnerships for Africa's development is a work in progress. Africa must reverse its declining share in global trade, attract more foreign investment and make foreign aid work for the population. In 2014, Africa's share of global merchandise exports declined to 3.0 per cent from 3.3 per cent in 2013, largely as a result of unfavourable global commodity prices. Most members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee have not fulfilled their commitments to provide 0.7 per cent of their gross national income as official development assistance to developing countries. In 2014, only five countries (Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom) met or surpassed the 0.7 per cent target, with no change from 2013. In addition, Africa's share of total official development assistance is declining – in 2014, African least developed countries received only 63.8 per cent of total disbursements, down from 79.5 per cent in 1990.

3. Transitioning to the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

As Africa prepared for the transition to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063, its performance on five of the eight Millennium Development Goals was impressive. Progress remained weak on three. Africa faces a two-pronged transition: a transition to the 2030 Agenda at the global level and a continental transition to Agenda 2063.

Agenda 2063 is a long-term development framework, anchored by seven aspirations that are supported by corresponding goals, priority areas, targets and strategies. There are 20 goals that apply to the first 10-year implementation plan. The framework consolidates new and existing regional initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development into a forward-looking transformational framework for Africa.

There is convergence between the two agendas, particularly at the level of goals, in part because of Africa's active contribution to the drafting of the post-2015 development agenda through the Common African Position. Agenda 2063 also builds on elements of the Common African Position, and so several of the priorities in the 2030 Agenda are reflected in Agenda 2063. Both agendas span the three dimensions of sustainability - economic, social and environmental - and espouse inclusiveness and home-grown solutions for development. Structural transformation underpinned by industrialization stands at the heart of the goals and targets relating to economic development. The social development priorities focus on health, education, water and sanitation, gender and social inclusion. The environmental priorities focus on measures to address climate change, as well as to preserve and harness marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

But the two agendas are not identical, and implementing them will require effective messaging about their content and harmonized integration.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

A promising start for the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 offer an opportunity for Africa to complete the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals. They provide important prototypes for States to develop and strengthen their national long-term development visions. Integrating the two agendas into a common framework, and ensuring that national development plans are adapted to them, will provide opportunities to promote policy coherence as well as minimize duplication and the reporting burden. This will also position development partners to support a single coherent set of development priorities. Development partners will need to support African States by

devising a coherent framework that integrates both agendas in a balanced way.

The Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 come at time of renewed interest in national long-term development planning in Africa. These global and regional development frameworks promise hope for accelerated, inclusive and sustainable development in Africa. The international development aspirations, goals and targets create positive competition among member countries; they are also an important platform for rallying national development practitioners in government, civil society and the private sector as well as development partners towards a common cause.

5. Recommendations

Clarity about the relationship between the global and continental agendas is needed for a successful transition. Integrated and coordinated institutional arrangements for implementation, strengthened capacities for data collection and analysis, and a monitoring and evaluation system that takes account of sectoral and subnational requirements are needed.

Periodic review needed to remain on track. Effective follow-up of both agendas requires a multitiered architecture of arrangements spanning continental, national and subnational jurisdictions.

Stronger institutional arrangements needed. Successful implementation of both agendas will require an effective institutional architecture. Sustainable development requires an integrated and coordinated approach to problem-solving and policymaking. The role of planning agencies will be paramount in ensuring that the economic, social and environmental sectors work closely together to ensure that the three dimensions are reflected in all aspects of development programming.

Stronger coordination mechanisms needed. Transparent economic, political and social institutions, with improved capacities to deliver services, design appropriate policies and strategies and monitor/report on progress, are crucial to realizing both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The sequential approach to sustainable development of "develop first and address sustainability issues later" undertaken by African governments in the past has

not worked. The Rio+20 conference reiterated the need for an integrated and balanced approach which simultaneously addresses the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Such an approach should transcend institutional silos and help to strengthen sectoral and subnational coordination across implementing entities.

Development partners should support countries in designing an integration framework for the two agendas. Coherent implementation, monitoring and evaluation of both agendas will require an integrated set of goals, targets and indicators and a harmonized review and reporting platform. In the integration process, three categories of indicators emerge: indicators that overlap or are common to both agendas; indicators that are exclusive to Agenda 2063; and those that are exclusive to the 2030 Agenda. A possible option is to design an integrated framework that defines an aggregate of core indicators from each of the three indicator categories. To address these concerns the African Union Commission and the Economic Commission for Africa are developing a core set of regional indicators against which regional economic communities and African member States can report.

Data challenges must be addressed. Access to up-to-date and disaggregated data is vital for effective reporting. Indicators for the 2030 Agenda are classified into three categories: those for which data exist, with an agreed methodology for data collection; those with commonly accepted methodologies but no reliable sources of data; and those with neither accepted methodologies nor reliable data. Similar challenges exist for the Agenda 2063 indicators. Addressing the data challenges will require concerted efforts and coordination with National Statistics Offices to design methodologies, establish baselines and compile data.

Aligning the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 with each other and with national planning cycles will be needed for effective implementation and reporting. The fact that the two agendas have different timelines raises questions about the operational compatibility between the two. Furthermore, national long-term and medium-term planning cycles are rarely aligned with the regional and global frameworks. In some cases this could potentially delay implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda

2063. Agenda 2063 is operationalized through a series of 10-year implementation plans. The first two end in 2033, almost coinciding with the date of final reporting under the 2030 Agenda.

Efforts to align national planning cycles with the regional and global cycles promise positive pay-offs. Countries whose medium-term plans coincided with the start date of the Sustainable Development Goals are better placed to align their new plans with the Goals and Agenda 2063. Thus, countries that are currently implementing existing plans will need to review their plans in the light of the new global and continental frameworks.

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