



The Future of Africa: Contours of Opportunities and Challenges



Africa's development trajectory since independence has been a topic full of contradictions and contours. As a continent endowed with resources that no other continent has, there is need for a deeper analysis to delve into the reasons why development has been not only slow but also lagging amid plenty yet, over the past decade or two, the narrative "Africa Rising", has been a dominant discourse. There are a number of reasons towards this narrative, chief among them being:

- Increased consciousness of how rich the continent is and yet Africa remains poor;
- Irrefutable evidence of Africa being a "Youthful continent" - meaning that the continent is home to one of the rare resources - cheap labour;
- Structural Economic transformation through an integrated and visionary initiatives by African leadership through the African Union;
- A continued transition of labour out of low productivity sectors (e.g. subsistence agriculture, informal economy) towards high productivity sectors.
- Improved governance, increased levels of education and investment, growing urban middle classes, deepening financial markets, region-wide ICT revolutions, on-going electrification, and rapid demographic growth as a result of major improvements in human health, this is to mention but a few.



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But Africa as a continent is not a continent that is easy to navigate in terms of mapping its development. However, a number of key issues have recently emerged which have the potential to spur growth and development. Here, I highlight a few not necessarily in order but as critical issues.



First, there is need to understand the rapid transformation processes presently underway in Africa – those that are to do with demographic expansion and fast urbanization; those to do with economic development; those with an angle to social progress to environmental challenges; other which are to do with technological innovation ... to continental integration. Critically are those to do with political change while at the same time there is also a new wave on migratory pressures.

Second, one critical issue which has not received a lot of attention in the ‘Future of Africa’ narrative is Africa’s increased population. The continent’s life expectancy has improved tremendously over the past few decades and, as a result, Africa’s population is set to double in the next three decades, accounting for more than a quarter of the world population by 2050. This growth will mostly involve urban centres. With 51.3% of the population of Africa being under 21 years and, with an urban growth rate of 3.42%, the issue of population growth cannot be overlooked in Africa’s future development trajectory – both as an opportunity as well as a challenge.

Third, Africa is now in what is popularly known as the “Fourth Industrial Revolution”. However, despite lagging behind advanced and other emerging countries on development, Africa is slowly, but surely, finding its own ways of benefitting from the technology revolution. This is increasingly happening by skipping inefficient or costly solutions and directly adopting the more technologically advanced ways of solving socio-economic challenges. The increasing turn on the focus and adoption of technology by many institutions of higher learning is testimony to this revolution. Alongside the many challenges, the new technological transformations are also showing unforeseen and massive potential as positive game changers for Africa’s economic and social development.

Fourth, no country can develop without proper infrastructure development. This requires massive government investment. In Africa, the development of infrastructure has been, and it continues to be, historically a major bottleneck. From transportation to energy, from water distribution systems to ICT grids, the deficit of Africa’s infrastructure is the major culprit in the way of progress. It can be acknowledged that the shift in the financing of social and economic development from the western-centric model to that of the Sino-Africa partnership, has seen an immense progress on infrastructure development on the continent. Still, Africa need further investments to close the gap and offer greater opportunities for farmers whose access to the market is greatly hampered by poor infrastructure network.

Fifth, there is a silent narrative on “Intra- and Inter-Africa trade, as a major component for Africa’s development future. For a long time, the West, through the World Trade Organisation, has had the monopoly of imposing draconian rules and regulations – essentially capturing African States at their mercy, on trade. This trend has been precipitated by lack of Intra- and Inter-African trade which in



Africa is only at 15% (Songwe, 2019). This dismal inter- and intra-Africa performance paves way not only for African countries to continue to depend on the West for support but it also weakens Africa's economic prospects and job creation as most of the manufacturing is exported. The share of intra-African exports as a percentage of total African exports has increased from about 10 percent in 1995 to around 17 percent in 2017, but it remains low compared to levels in Europe (69 percent), Asia (59 percent), and North America (31 percent). This is an important reason to expect that trade will be a key driver of growth in Africa. Unless this trend is changed, there will never be progress in achieving Africa's Agenda 2063.

Sixth, when Patric Bond wrote his book 'Looting Africa', where he demonstrated the evils of exploitation by the West through trade and other means, little did we fathom the ripple effects of that internally (in Africa). Today, the 'looting' is not only by the West but by Africans themselves. The current levels of corruption and malpractices in Sub-Sahara Africa is glaringly high. While many African countries have adopted capitalism as their economic model, capitalism in most African countries has witnessed the emergence of excessively powerful ruling elites with incomes derived from financial-parasitical accumulation. This is a major point of concern.

Seventh, Africa's development trajectory can only be dictated by investment in human capital development, education being major. Time and again, the global development machinery has undermined Africa's dream of developing its own capacity through education by debt servicing whose major chunk is cuts in education spending. In addition, conditionalities tagged against debt are incredibly prohibitive to the extent where countries in Africa will spend more in servicing loans than spending money in major basic social services like education and health. Enabled by corrupt practices, this is one of the major challenges for Africa's development future.

Africa as a continent must deal head-on with the disruptions described above. Universities in Africa must echo the voice of change for improved economic performance, governance and inclusivity in our continent. The RUFORUM effort of promoting intra-Africa academic mobility to train African students in universities across Africa, is one way to train a new generation of African scholars who know our continent, know the development opportunities and challenges and will work towards promoting integration of our continent.

About the Author:

Prof. Address Mauakowa Malata is an outstanding leader in the global development of nursing and midwifery education, and in improving maternal health in Sub Saharan Africa. As the Vice Chancellor of the Malawi University of Science and Technology, she is the first female to hold such a position in her country. She is the Winner of the ECU distinguished Alumni Award, ECU recognises her remarkable achievements in improving



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