

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS AN AFRICAN AGENDA

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Sustainable development as an African agenda

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Abstract

One of the most common misconceptions about Africa is that Africa is only a recipient of ideas and aid. This view of Africa is not only narrow-minded and dismissive, but it also overlooks the fact that Africa has been a rich source of ideas about how societies should be. These ideas stem from politics, history, and economics and include notions of development embedded in the ethos of African societies. This paper adds to mainstream accounts of Africa's role in global development, looking at the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and the African Union's Agenda 2063, and illustrating the role of African institutions and individuals in informing both regional and global development agendas. The authors describe some of the contributions of African institutions and leaders to global development debates. They do this by presenting the case of Agenda 2063 to illustrate the continental initiatives that preceded and most likely informed discussions that led to the SDGs agenda, challenging the misconception of Africa as merely a recipient of ideas about global development.

The authors describe how Africa exerted its agency by presenting the Africa Agenda 2063 to the continent and the world. Africa Agenda 2063 tabled a continental vision of Africa and its development, which was part of the debates about the Post 2015 Development Agenda taking place at the time. The authors detail the timeliness of Africa's Agenda 2063 in contemporary discussions on the SDGs and future debates about development agendas in 2030. The AU's Agenda 2063 illustrates Africa's agency in proposing development visions. It constitutes a compass for the continent and perhaps a more realistic vision for the world's development in the debates ahead for the post-2030 development agenda.

Keywords

Africa Agenda 2063, Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Africa, Development, Agenda 2063.

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1. Introduction

Africa is and will continue to be a source of ideas for the future. Despite this, some Eurocentric narratives on development in and from Africa portray the continent as lacking agency and merely receiving ideas and aid.²

Development, along with its ideas, occurs in a contested field that involves multiple actors, all attempting to shape development agendas according to their beliefs and interests. In this context, the understanding of development and how development agendas are shaped often fail to account for the role of African countries adequately. Consequently, when Africans oppose or challenge such narratives from regional powers, the responses from those dominating existing narratives are often rigid and repetitive, offering a one-dimensional and limited account of history. The portrayal of Africa in development discourse usually simplifies its history, implying that the silences about Africa's initiatives results from the continent's making. Such accounts fail to acknowledge the significant contributions of African leaders and nations towards development, both in the colonial and post-colonial eras. These are accounts of someone else's history, an expression of neo-colonialism³; as coined by Kwame Nkrumah.

However, history and its interpretation are projections of different worldviews. In Africa, Eurocentric historical accounts often reflect perspectives that assume little or no agency from Africa. Acknowledging and appreciating the people's agency can provide a more precise portrayal of the continent.

In this document, we examine Africa Agenda 2063 (AA2063). We note how AA2063 emerged concurrently with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs 2030) and Africa Agenda 2063 and preceded the adoption of the SDGs. However, it is confusing that accounts for the role of Africa in articulating its vision for development (a continental agency) are largely absent in the discourses on the processes that led to the SDGs or in the global sustainable development debates. Despite the challenge of prevailing narratives about Africa's past and future by individuals and institutions,^{4,5,6} AA2063 demonstrates that Africans have exercised agency in creating their vision of development.

This agency has been manifested in ideas, particularly within the postcolonial and decolonial paradigms. It represents the broader intellectual effort of institutions and individuals. Figures such as Franz Fanon, Sophie Oluwole, Steve Biko, Onkgopotse Tiro, Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, Julius Nyerere, and numerous other African intellectuals did not emerge in isolation or despite their context. They arose within environments that actively fostered (and continued to foster) ideas, debates, and discussions, contributing to the development of alternative perspectives on development that contested hegemonic global visions.⁷ AA2063 and the African contributions towards the process that brought the

² Agugua, 2018.

³ Neo-colonialism refers to the ways former colonizers and new global forces manage to control the newly independent nations through their economic political, and cultural power and influence, replacing direct military and governance control. See Langan, M., 2018.

⁴ Brizuela-Garcia, 2018.

⁵ Agugua, 2018.

⁶ Baillie & Sørensen, 2021.

⁷ Several progressive initiatives from the continent illustrate this agency, such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (also known as the Maputo protocol).

SDGs 2030 are part of these initiatives that strive to seize back their narratives and development agendas.

AA2063 has emerged as a continental proposal for sustainable development in Africa. Its merits transcend the continent by contributing to the post-2015 development agenda debate. However, despite the importance of Africa's contributions and AA2063's role as a continental development vision for Africa and the world, little acknowledgement remains of AA2063's usefulness in developing the SDGs 2030, and its targets are mainly absent and unaccounted for in global development debates.

This paper addresses some gaps in the accounts surrounding AA2063 and its significance in shaping global development debates. It presents a chronological account, highlighting Africa's contributions to the international discussions that led to the 2030 goals for Sustainable Development. By doing so, we reveal how AA2063 was instrumental in shaping Africa's vision of development and contributed to the process leading up to the SDG agenda. We highlight the role of African ideas and institutions in advocating for social and environmental sustainability principles to be incorporated into a development agenda.

This document is structured into five sections. The first section outlines the significance of the SDG 2030 and AA2063 processes.⁸ The second section thoroughly examines the SDGs, highlighting their core objectives and transformative vision. The third section focuses on the Africa Agenda 2063 and discusses Africa's specific aspirations and development strategies. The fourth section emphasises the synergies between the two agendas (i.e., the SDGs and AA2063), detailing how AA2063 and the Common African Position (CAP) contributed to the discussions around SDG 2030. Finally, the paper concludes by summarising the key insights.

2. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a new set of global goals

Several accounts of who, how and why the SDGs were conceived exist. In an interview published by the German Council for Sustainable Development, describes the emergence of the ideas behind the SDGs.⁹ According to this account, Caballero, a former World Bank official from Colombia, and Londoño, a Colombian diplomat, played crucial roles in creating the SDGs. The perspective informing these ideas argued that development should not be limited to developing countries alone; that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)- the existing framework for a “common” development agenda was an agenda only for poor developing countries, and that the current development lenses were not addressing critical issues such as societal or environmental concerns.¹⁰

Caballero and Londoño's ideas while important, they emerged within a wealth of discussions brewing and pushing for a new paradigm for development for at least a decade. One of the most influential was

⁸ This is informed by a series of interviews (unstructured interviews) with insiders involved in these processes, that followed a snowball sampling approach.

⁹ <https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/en/news/the-world-without-the-sdgs-would-be-a-much-darker-place/>

¹⁰ Caballero; & Londoño, 2019.

the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Rio Summit.¹¹

Caballero's ideas found fertile ground in the preparatory meetings, and the discussions leading to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which aimed to reflect on the previous agenda and propose a way forward. While Paula Caballero is often credited with playing a significant role in advocating for SDGs and shaping their framework, the development of the goals involved extensive consultations and negotiations among UN member states and numerous stakeholders.¹²

The SDGs resulted from decades of work by countries and the UN, including the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, involving important milestones such as the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the Millennium Declaration at the Millennium Summit at the UN Headquarters in New York in 2000, establishing eight MDGs to reduce extreme poverty by 2015. Subsequently, the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of Implementation from 2002 presented the global community's commitments to poverty eradication and the environment.

We proceed to discuss the transition from the MDG's to the SDG's as well as the role of the Open Working Group (OWG) in bringing about the SDG's in the sections below.

2.1 From the MDGs to the SDGs: Shifting from targeted goals to a universal and inclusive development agenda

The SDGs are widely recognised as successors to the MDGs. The MDGs were a set of eight global objectives agreed upon by UN Member States in 2000. Figure 1 shows a list of eight goals proposed by the MDGs. These goals aimed to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women.

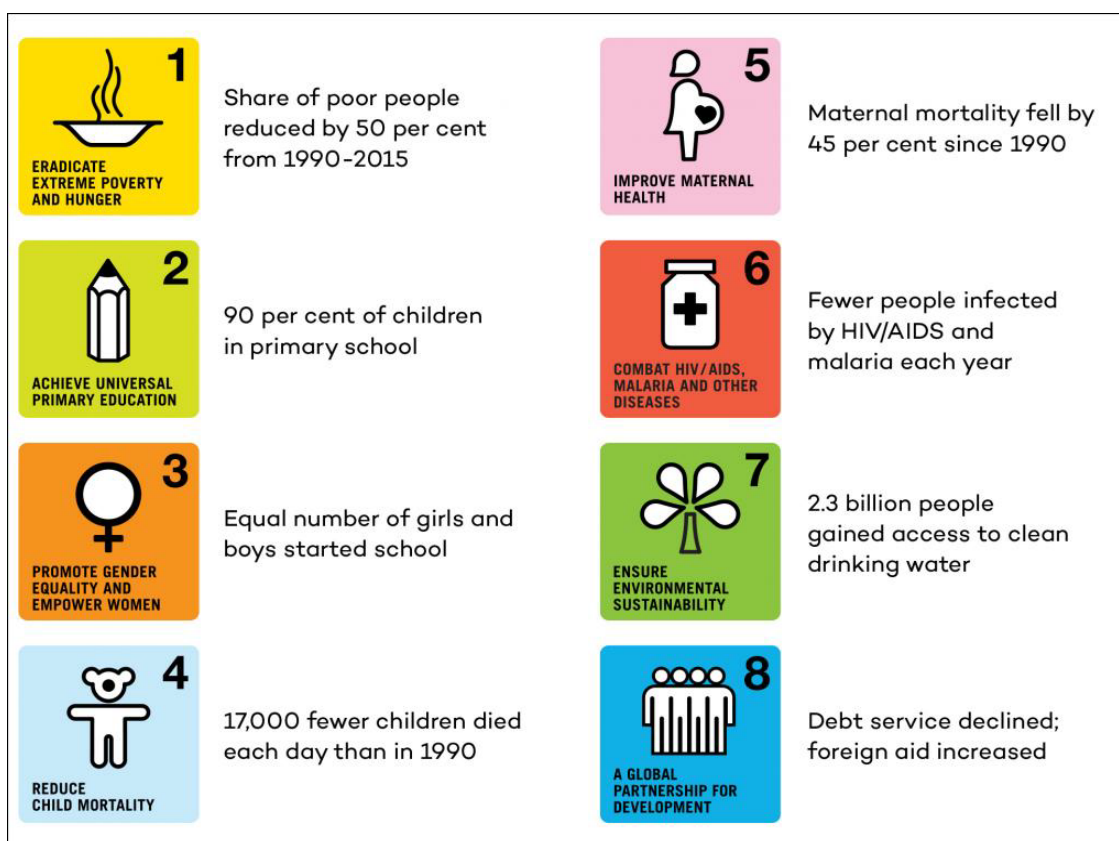
The MDGs assumed that discrete developmental interventions were necessary and sufficient to achieve these goals. For example, the first MDG aimed to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. It had specific targets, such as halving the proportion of people whose daily income was less than \$1.25, achieving full and productive employment for all, including young people and women, and halving the proportion of individuals suffering from hunger between 1990 and 2015.

However, this approach ignored the intersectional dimensions of development and how associated contextual factors might limit achieving a particular goal. For example, a person might earn an income above a poverty threshold indicator if their income is above a certain daily income threshold (for example, \$1.25). Still, their well-being may not necessarily be better, or they could enjoy greater income, if they reside in a context affected by environmental degradation, high inequalities, or social turmoil.

¹¹ United Nations, 1992.

¹² <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Figure 1: Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Source: United Nations, 2015.¹³

One significant shortcoming of the MDGs is their narrow focus on development as primarily economic, broadly understood only through economic indicators.¹⁴ While the MDGs included goals related to health, education, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, they were often framed in ways envisioned to support economic outcomes. The broader social, cultural, and political dimensions of development were either secondary or instrumentalised to achieve economic targets.¹⁵ This approach overlooked development's complex and interconnected nature, reducing it to economic metrics and discrete policy interventions, rather than a process encompassing various aspects of human well-being and societal progress. As these limitations became evident, adjusting notions of development to include social and environmental factors gained traction.¹⁶

The critiques of the MDGs and the limited success in achieving these goals brought valuable lessons that informed the subsequent formulation of a new set of development goals: the SDGs. Within these contributions, the inclusion of environmental and social aspects for development surfaced as essential

¹³ United Nations, 2015. The eight [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#), adopted by all UN member states and major development institutions, aimed to address global challenges like extreme poverty, HIV/AIDS, and universal primary education by 2015.

¹⁴ Shakoor & Ahmed, 2023.

¹⁵ Parotto & Pablos-Méndez, 2023.

¹⁶ Interview with Carlos Lopes 2023. Carlos Lopes, former UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA. "We need to re-emphasize strategies and policies for structural agricultural transformation. Considering the integrated approach to the economic, social and environmental dimensions we need to focus on food, land, water, forest security, bio energy resources, urban-rural as well as forward and backward linkages between agriculture and other evolving sectors of the African economies. This is how we will make agribusiness a major goal."

and became central to the discussions of developing developmental goals that could be within reach and sustainable.

However, the transition from the MDGs to a new agenda was not free from criticism.¹⁷ Critics pointed out that the proposed ideas for the new agenda were more complex and ambitious than the MDGs, which could make them harder to achieve.¹⁸ Others expressed doubts regarding the feasibility of executing and tracking advancements towards a broader set of indicators and goals. They also argued about the challenges of funding a new global common development agenda that seemed ambiguous at the time. Nonetheless, the drafting of a new development agenda, resulted from a comprehensive political process involving multiple consultations and revisions among governments, a collective effort by global institutions.¹⁹

As Lopes argues, the change in the global development agenda was part of a process of continuous and collective transformation that led to the drafting of the SDGs' vision operationalised by the work of the Open Working Group (OWG) (see Section 3).^{20, 21}

The documented accounts of the discussions for a new development agenda informed by the limitations of the MDGs can be traced back to the Solo Meeting in Indonesia in July 2011. At this meeting, supporters of a new development agenda advocated the importance of including environmental, social, and political aspects in a more sustainable approach to development. This discussion—focusing on sustainable economic growth, sustainable management and usage of water, and sustainable peace—became integral to the debates leading up to the Rio+20 Conference.²²

While the MDGs were formulated without extensive large-scale negotiations, drafting the post-2015 development agenda was more inclusive, involving a broad spectrum of actors across geographies and areas of work and acknowledging the multidimensionality of actors and views involved in development. Rio20+ created a venue that enabled the participation of governments, CSOs, INGOs, and activists in discussions on sustainability. This diversity and democratic nature were central to the outcome document of Rio+20, titled "The Future We Want," a vision for a new global development agenda.²³

Rio+20 highlighted the imperative to integrate economic, social, and environmental aspects, the importance of sustainability, and shared responsibility for this across all world countries. The document became central in shaping the trajectory of global sustainable development debates and created a collective vision that explicitly called for a new international development agenda that would include the environmental, social, and economic aspects of development.²⁴

¹⁷ Caballero; & Londoño, 2019.

¹⁸ Ritchie & Roser, 2018.

¹⁹ United Nations Development Programme, 2015.

²⁰ Interview with Carlos Lopes 2023.

²¹ United Nations, 2014.

²² The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from June 20-22, 2012. This conference was a follow-up to the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. It resulted in a political outcome document with measures for sustainable development, including the launch of the SDGs and strengthening of the United Nations Environment Programme.

²³ United Nations, 2012.

²⁴ United Nations, 2013a.

As a result of the Rio+20 and UN resolutions following this meeting, a High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)²⁵ was formed to monitor progress and facilitate the implementation of sustainable development initiatives within this new development vision. The HLPF reviewed progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments contained in different multilateral agreements, such as Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation,²⁶ and the Barbados Programme of Action.²⁷

In addition, the UN General Assembly highlighted principles regarding how a new set of goals for a development agenda could be elaborated.²⁸ They would consider different national circumstances, capacities, and priorities, embrace the interdependence of social, economic and environmental goals, and be universal - meaning they would apply to both “developed” and “underdeveloped” countries. This resolution clarified that these goals should be integrated into the United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015, mainstreaming sustainable development.

2.2 Shaping the SDGs: The Role of the Open Working Group and Global Collaboration

The United Nations General Assembly 66/288 resolution embraced the idea advanced at Rio+20 of forming the Open Working Group (OWG). This working group undertook a collaborative process to develop an SDG proposal.²⁹ These goals would build upon the strengths of the MDGs and apply universally to all countries. The OWG held 13 meetings between March 2013 and July 2014 (Table 1).

²⁵ [High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development \(un.org\)](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/high-level-political-forum-on-sustainable-development/)

²⁶ As illustrated in United Nations (2002), the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation was adopted at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, outlining measures for environmentally respectful development in areas such as water, energy, health, agriculture, and biodiversity.

²⁷ The Barbados Programme of Action was established by UN General Assembly resolution 47/189 and held in Barbados from April 25 to May 6, 1994. It addresses vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States, identifying priority areas including climate change, waste management, and biodiversity, and cross-sectoral areas like capacity building and trade diversification.

²⁸ United Nations, 2013b.

²⁹ United Nations, 2014.

Table 1. Open Working Group (OWG) meetings

Meeting Name	Meeting Description	Meeting Date
First Meeting	Set the groundwork and discussed methods of work.	March 2013
Second Meeting	Addressed poverty eradication and conceptualising the SDGs.	April 2013
Third Meeting	Focused on food security, nutrition, water and sanitation.	May 2013
Fourth Meeting	Explored employment, decent work, health and population dynamics.	June 2013
Fifth Meeting	Discussed sustainable economic growth, industrialisation, and infrastructure.	July 2013
Sixth Meeting	Means of implementation, needs of countries in special situations and the right to development	December 2013
Seventh Meeting	Dived into sustainable consumption and production (including chemicals and waste), climate change and disaster risk reduction.	January 2014
Eighth Meeting	Addressed forests, oceans and seas, and biodiversity. Also, gender equality and conflict prevention.	February 2014
Ninth Meeting	Deliberations on SDGs	March 2014
Tenth Meeting	Further discussions on SDGs	April 2014
Eleventh Meeting	Continuing work on SDGs	May 2014
Twelfth Meeting	Advancing the SDGs agenda	June 2014
Thirteenth Meeting	Finalising proposals for SDGs	July 2014

Source: Author's elaboration based on minutes from the OWG meetings³⁰

The OWG developed a proposal for a new development agenda to be adopted by all UN members. The agenda's principle of universality meant that all countries had an equal say in the process.³¹ The capacity of the OWG to bring different voices into the conversation resulted from the OWG's design and the role played by its chairs, Macharia Kamau from Kenya and Csilla Kőrösi from Hungary. It can, therefore, be argued that the idea of a new development agenda and the process of its proposal were led by visions of the Global South: a Latin American vision spearheaded the concept of a new development agenda,³² and an African coordinated the process of bringing the proposal for a new development agenda into being, informed by ideas from Africa, such as the CAP. Figure 2 illustrates the development goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Kamau et al., 2018.

³² Caballero & Londoño, 2019.

Figure 2: The sustainable development goals of the SDGs 2030³³

Source: United Nations Development Programme, 2015

The African Union Assembly recognised the need to strengthen Africa's institutional framework and integrate economic, social, and environmental sustainability principles considering the debates about a new development agenda. Also, individuals from the continent played significant roles in the process of drafting the new agenda, such as Amina Mohammed, the UN Secretary General's point person for the discussion about a new development agenda.³⁴ In addition to this, the continent was also present in these debates by tabling and actively contributing ideas with researchers from the continent participating in the process as well as continental contributions towards the OWG, such as its Common African Position (CAP), and Africa Agenda 2063.³⁵ The African Union, through these discussion documents underscored that existing global structures and visions were inadequate to address Africa's unique needs (see Section 3).

In January 2015, the UN General Assembly began negotiations on the proposals tabled by the OWG. This involved member states discussing, debating, and amending the goals and targets of the proposal. As part of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, the UN held a Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015. The objective of this summit was to formally adopt a new global

³³ [United Nations Development Programme](#), 2015

³⁴ Mohammed, A.J, n.d.

³⁵ African Union, 2012.

development agenda to succeed in the MDGs that were about to expire in 2015. After this summit, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 SDGs, was adopted unanimously.

3. The Africa Agenda 2063: Africa's vision for its development

The African Union Agenda, known as Africa Agenda 2063 or Agenda 2063, is the roadmap for Africa's future development represented in the motto *the Africa we want*.³⁶ It aims for inclusive and sustainable development, embodying the '*pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity*'.³⁷

Africa Agenda 2063 represents a bold vision for the continent's transformation and development rooted in the ideals of Pan-Africanism and self-determination.³⁸ Historical challenges, such as weak governance structures, economic vulnerabilities, and limited industrialisation, have often reinforced Africa's marginalisation in international decision-making,³⁹ does not mean African leaders and institutions have not actively pursued transformative frameworks to address these disparities.

Africa Agenda 2063 is a comprehensive roadmap for sustainable growth and empowerment, reflecting the continents' aspirations for inclusive development and strengthened regional integration.⁴⁰ A roadmap whose process and history remains mostly under accounted for.

Drafting of the AA2063 started in 2012, when the African Union changed leadership, with Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma becoming the Commission's president. At that time, significant debates focused on the perceived inequities of the MDGs in addressing Africa's specific challenges.⁴¹ Simultaneously, the Economic Commission for Africa experienced a leadership shift with Carlos Lopes's appointment as Executive Secretary, marking a renewed focus on African-centred development strategies.

The MDGs were criticised for being unfair to Africa for several reasons. First, they compared Africa's progress with other regions without considering the unique challenges African countries face, thus failing to account for local realities and the varying stages of development among countries.^{42, 43} This lack of acknowledgement of Africans' local realities made it much more likely to "fail" than other regions.⁴⁴ This unfairness is explained by the former Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa:

"[...] when we conceptualised the MDGs, all the indicators were universal. However, these universal indicators were later translated into national indicators without any changes [in relation to their national contexts]. This meant that if the goal was to reduce global poverty by half, it would not be the same as reducing poverty by half in Malawi [or Sweden]. For instance, expecting Malawi to reduce its poverty level from 60% to 30% is not the same as expecting Sweden [to do so] (which has a poverty level of 1%) to reduce it to half 0.5%. Despite their different situations, this equal translation of the universal goal to all countries

³⁶ African Union, 2015a.

³⁷ African Union, 2015b.

³⁸ Viswanathan, 2018.

³⁹ Addison et al., 2016.

⁴⁰ Jayne et al., 2018.

⁴¹ Easterly, 2007.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Kindra & Wasswa-Mugambwa, 2015.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

does not make sense. However, this became the standard for evaluating performance on the MDGs".⁴⁵

During the eighteenth Ordinary Session of the AU held in Addis Ababa on 29-30 January 2012, the AU made a crucial decision regarding the then forthcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). The AU Assembly emphasised the continent's readiness for Rio+20 by highlighting its goals and needs.

The AU recognised the need to strengthen Africa's institutional framework and integrate economic, social, and environmental sustainability principles as central to any new development vision. It also underscored that the current global development structures were inadequate to address Africa's needs. It emphasised the importance of transitioning the development agenda to align with sustainability principles, including promoting green economies and strengthening institutional frameworks.

The arrival of Dlamini-Zuma preceded the Jubilee celebrations of the African Union in 2013. This celebration and the reflection on the gaps in the development agendas of the time informed the interest in reflecting on Africa's achievements in the past 50 years and its goals for the next 50 years.

Dlamini-Zuma envisioned this jubilee celebration as a moment for Africa to reflect on the achievements of the past 50 years and chart a course for the next 50 years. It was decided that a discussion between the country leaders on the continent would take place to chart this course. The formulation of this agenda was facilitated through an interactive dialogue moderated by the head of ECA. During the subsequent Twenty-First Ordinary Session held in Addis Ababa on May 26-27, 2013, the Assembly of the AU decided to create a High-level Committee of Heads of State and Government to forge regional and inter-continental alliances in support of the Common African Position on discussions around a global development agenda. The Common African Position originated in the resolution of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in July 2012.⁴⁶ This resolution tasked the AUC with identifying Africa's key priorities for inclusion in the "Post-2015 Development Agenda" in collaboration with Member States and Regional Economic Communities.

Despite facing challenges and scepticism regarding the achievability of establishing a new vision for the continent, the momentum shifted in 2013 ahead of the Jubilee celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the African Union. Dlamini-Zuma envisioned this jubilee celebration as a moment for Africa to reflect on the achievements of the past 50 years and chart a course for the next 50 years. It was decided that a discussion between the country leaders on the continent would take place to chart this course. The formulation of this agenda was facilitated through an interactive dialogue moderated by ECA's head. During the subsequent Twenty-First Ordinary Session held in Addis Ababa on May 26-27, 2013, the Assembly of the AU decided to create a High-level Committee of Heads of State and Government to forge regional and inter-continental alliances in support of the Common African Position (CAP) on the post 2015 development agenda.

The Common African Position originated in the resolution of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in July 2012.⁴⁷ This resolution tasked the AUC with identifying Africa's key priorities for inclusion in the "Post-2015 Development Agenda" in collaboration with Member States and Regional Economic Communities.

During the same session, the AU made a significant decision regarding the development of AA2063.⁴⁸ In January 2014, the development of Agenda 2063 mandated the AUC, ECA, and the African Development Bank (AfDB) to work on articulating African Development Goals in the context of Agenda

⁴⁵ Carlos Lopes, interview September 2023.

⁴⁶ African Union, 2014a.

⁴⁷ African Union, 2014b.

⁴⁸ African Union, 2013.

2063.⁴⁹ This generated momentum for a new vision and catalysed the work that led to the seven aspirations for Africa, which later formed AA2063. These aspirations encapsulate the continent's collective goals. Figure 3 shows the seven Aspirations of AA2063.

Figure 3: The seven Aspirations of the AA2063



Source: AU Watch (2019)

Fast-forward to the Twenty-Fourth Ordinary Session of the Union, held on January 30-31, 2015, in Addis Ababa. The Assembly adopted the Agenda 2063 Framework Document and its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan.⁵⁰ The Framework Document outlined Agenda 2063's overarching vision, objectives, and priorities, structured around the seven aspirations that capture the continent's long-term transformation goals. It emphasised inclusive growth, sustainable development, regional integration, good governance, and Africa's role as a global partner. The document provided a blueprint for addressing historical challenges, capitalising on the continent's resources, and fostering shared prosperity.

The aspirations of AA2063 did not emerge in a vacuum; in fact, they connect, are informed by, and leverage past continental initiatives. For instance, the fourth aspiration of AA2063 is to strive for a peaceful and secure Africa in which all inter- and intra-national conflicts cease. This aspiration resonates deeply the 1992 African Union's Mechanism for Preventing, Managing, and Resolving Conflicts in Africa was a pioneering initiative under the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to proactively address conflicts before they escalated into crises, and the work of the African Union's Peace and Security Council in

⁴⁹ African Union, 2014b.

⁵⁰ African Union, 2015b.

2002,⁵¹ and exemplify the continent's dedication to drafting and materialising their vision with regards to sustainable development.⁵²

The First Ten-Year Implementation Plan operationalised the Framework Document by defining specific targets, timelines, and flagship projects to be achieved. It detailed priority areas such as infrastructure development (e.g., the Integrated High-Speed Train Network), industrialisation, youth empowerment through initiatives such as the African Skills Agenda, and advancing continental free trade through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It also incorporated measures to strengthen peace and security, promote gender equality, and enhance political and economic governance across member states. The Assembly also endorsed the decision to use the proposal from AA2063 and the OWG on development as the primary basis for negotiations on the SDG's agenda. This choice reflects a strategic alignment, as the OWG proposal effectively encompasses the key elements of the CAP priorities outlined in AA2063, thereby reinforcing Africa's development objectives within the global framework.

Agenda 2063 and the CAP embodied Africans' hopes and ambitions. It informed the Post-2015 Development Agenda by highlighting six key areas: economic transformation, science and innovation, people-centred development, environmental sustainability, peace and security, and finance and partnerships.

The MDGs informed the development of AA2063. The reflections about the MDGs and their weaknesses concerning Africa led to a more holistic understanding of development, recognising the intrinsic interconnections among economic, social, and environmental dimensions.⁵³ The vision outlined in AA2063 places equal weight on fostering inclusive growth, social transformation and environmental sustainability. It contends that economic progress must translate into improved living standards, education, healthcare, and overall human development for all segments of society. It incorporates climate change, biodiversity conservation, and responsible natural resource management concerns. It understands that economic development must occur within ecological bounds to ensure the well-being of future generations.⁵⁴ This forward-looking perspective sets it apart as a long-term vision for Africa, allowing for a sovereign and sustainable approach to development.

Therefore, AA2063 is a development agenda and a call for economic, environmental, and societal integration across the continent. It strongly emphasises promoting economic prosperity and sustainable development and recognises the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental factors driving Africa's progress.

For non-African partners, Agenda 2063 calls for concrete commitments to support these transitions. This included financial assistance through grants and concessional loans, technology transfers to facilitate green innovations, and capacity-building initiatives to equip African institutions with the necessary skills and expertise. The agenda also urged global partners to honour international agreements, such as the Paris Climate Accord, and prioritise Africa's development in global funding mechanisms, such as the Green Climate Fund.

AA2063 underscores the significance of inclusive governance and participatory decision-making processes, empowering African citizens to contribute to the continent's development agenda actively. By embracing the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, it seeks to establish a foundation for good governance conducive to fostering stability, justice, and social cohesion.

AA2063 represents Africa's commitment to inclusive and sustainable development, embodying the principles of Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance. In contrast to the MDGs or the SDGs, which

⁵¹ Organization of African Unity, 1992.

⁵² African Union, 2002.

⁵³ African Union, 2015a.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

are planned with narrower implementation windows (of 15 years), AA 2063 outlines a 50-year time window from 2013 to 2063. This longer vision allows it to play a dynamic role in the global arena, beyond existing agendas, such as the SDGs.

In contrast to SDG 2030, AA2063 lists a smaller set of objectives: seven main aspirations (which the SDG agenda refers to as goals). This vision of development envisions economic prosperity for all Africans with inclusive growth strategies that uplift marginalised communities and promote sustainable development practices.

However, and despite its promising nature, these aspirations face the challenges of implementation. For example, Africa has experienced significant economic growth, with different sectors driving innovation and investment, yet poverty and inequality remain unabated. Politically, strides have been made towards democratic governance, with an increasing number of countries embracing multiparty systems and respecting human rights. However, coups and conflicts continue to take place and emerge in some countries on the continent.⁵⁵ Socially, initiatives promoting education, healthcare, wider social protection networks, and gender equality are gaining momentum and fostering inclusive and sustainable development but are lagging due to institutional challenges in addition to the multiple shocks of wars in Europe and global instability. Regional integration efforts, exemplified by projects such as the AfCFTA, aim to forge closer ties among African nations, amplifying the continent's collective voice globally; however,⁵⁶ yet remain challenged.

Despite these challenges, what AA2063 highlights is the possibility of aiming to follow an African path and charter to its own development, one that is cognizant of the challenges of the continent, and one that can be used to inform actionable plans and ideas that are more cognizant of the challenges of the continent.

4. A more inclusive account of the SDGs – the synergies between AA2063 and the SDGs

The conception and adoption of the SDGs 2030 and AA2063 played critical roles in shaping global and regional discussions, bringing about a new development vision. This section describes the chronology of both agendas, highlighting their co-simultaneity.

Figure 4 demonstrates a timeline of the AA2063 and SDGs 2030 and illustrates how the Africa with its Agenda 2063 and its CAP on the Post 2015 development agenda preceded the SDG's and informed the discussions on the SDGs 2030 on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Africa did not become active only after the UN sanctioned the 2030 SDG mandate; it played an active role in proposing ideas and visions for its development on continental and global platforms before this. AA2063, adopted in January 2015, predates the SDGs 2030, which was adopted only in September 2015. The First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP) of AA2063 was approved in June 2015.

This illustrates how, within the context of the African Union, Africa has proposed ambitious ideas and visions about development that resonate with the continent's and the world's future and its needs.

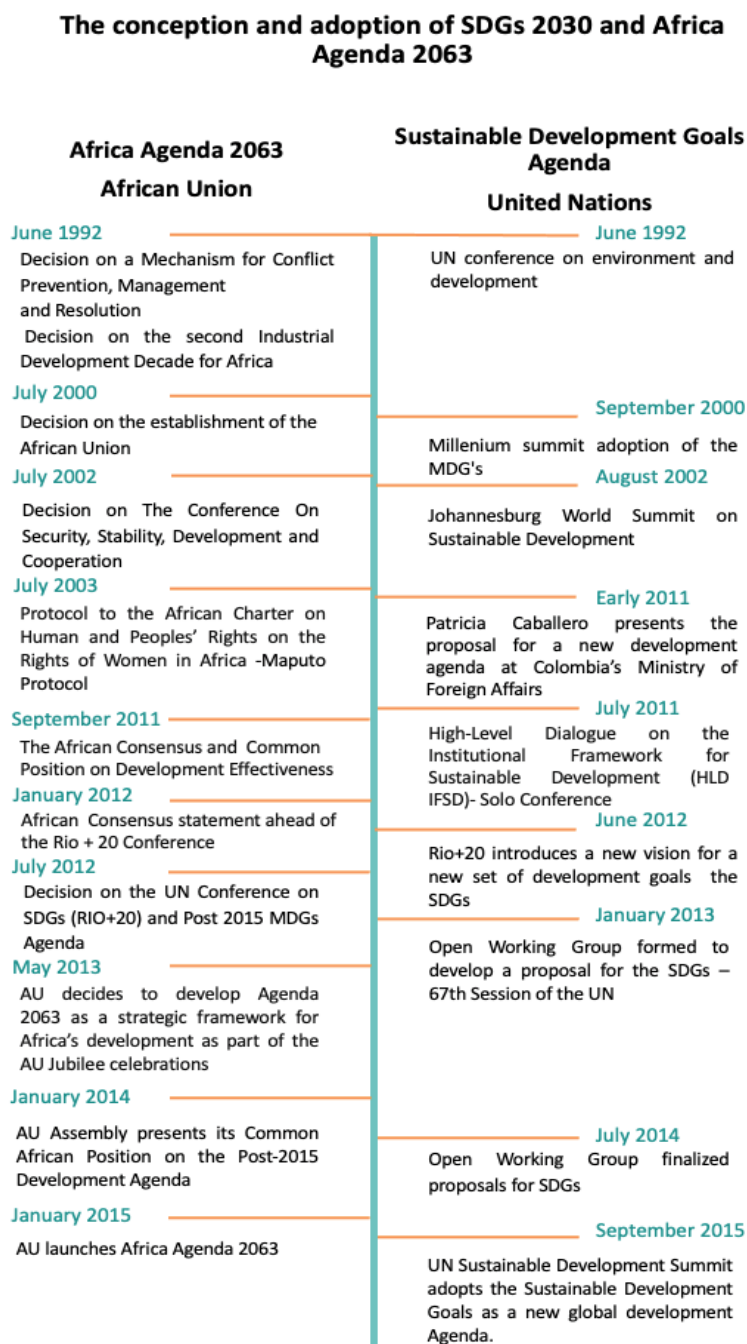
AA2063 is not an exception, it is part of an unrecognized trend. It highlights how Africans have constructed their vision of development and taken leadership within global institutions in shaping

⁵⁵ According Nyinevi & Fosu, 2023, between 2013 and 2022, there have been 12 instances of unconstitutional changes of government in different countries.

⁵⁶ World Bank, 2020.

global development frameworks. This has been evident during Kofi Annan's tenure as UN Secretary-General, in Amina Mohammed's leadership of the Secretary-General for the UN's office for Agenda 2030,⁵⁷ and Macharia Kamau's role as a co-coordinator of the Open Working Group led to the drafting of the 2030 SDGs,⁵⁸ yet these contributions remain largely unaccounted for.

Figure 4: A timeline of African and global ideas about development around the AA2063 and the SDGs 2030



Source: Authors elaboration, 2024

⁵⁷ Special Adviser to former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with the responsibility for post-2015 development planning. She led the process that resulted in global agreement around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. [Deputy Secretary-General | United Nations Secretary-General](#)

⁵⁸ Macharia Kamau, the Permanent Representative of Kenya, served as a co-chair of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html>

The reality is that nobody can own development and a particular development agenda, as development does not take place and cannot take place in autarky. However, it is important to note how actors exert their agency in debates on development visions. While certain historical narratives have often portrayed Africa as having a limited influence over global and regional agendas, this perspective overlooks African leaders' and institutions significant and varied contributions in shaping these discussions throughout history. This perspective reaffirms the importance of recognising Africa as a continent of active agents in their development, challenging the outdated notion of Africa as a 'white man's burden' that persists in some streams of international development literature.^{59,60}

African policy initiatives have demonstrated a continent's ability to inform global ideas. AA2063 has aligned regional strategies with SDGs 2030. The AU Assembly's decision to actively develop AA2063 highlighted its commitment to shaping its destiny and asserting its ideas (see Figure 4). The formal launch of AA2063 by the AUC in January 2015- predating the adoption of the SDG agenda by the UN General Assembly, illustrates Africa's ability to establish and pursue its own mandates. This was achieved through extensive consultations with stakeholders across the continent, including governments, civil society, private sector actors, and youth organisations, ensuring that the agenda reflected Africa's priorities and contexts. Africa Agenda 2063 showcases the continent's ability to envision ideas, as well as to lead development through projects like the AfCFTA and the Integrated High-Speed Train Network. The AfCFTA, established in 2021, created the world's largest free trade area, enhancing intra-African trade. By prioritising its development, Africa demonstrates its potential for exerting its own agency.

Africa was the first continent to bring a consolidated plan for action to the SDG discussion table and to finalise its position on the post-2015 agenda in March 2014, ahead of other collectives such as the European Union (EU). The CAP and AA2063 played a pivotal role in shaping the SDGs 2030, as they significantly informed the work of the Open Working Group and the formal intergovernmental negotiating group.⁶¹

While it is inaccurate to claim that the North, or any single individual, wrote the SDGs 2030 or AA2063, different initiatives complemented each other to support a new vision for a global development agenda that centres on the social and environmental dimensions of development in the face of new challenges.

While the AA2063 and the SDGs 2030 were drafted around the same period, it remains puzzling, given the global debates about development, that a continental initiative that was tabled and adopted before the agreements on the SDGs 2030 remains largely unaccounted for in the descriptions of the processes bringing about the SDGs 2030.⁶² Does this mean that African initiatives have been ignored? Or does this mean that African ideas continue to be seen as less legitimate or credible by international development actors? The marginalisation of African initiatives is not new, and often stems from structural imbalances in global governance, and knowledge creation, where African voices have historically been excluded or downplayed.

At the same time, perceptions of credibility remain an issue shaped by entrenched stereotypes and historical legacies of underdevelopment and dependency. For AA2063, credibility must be tied to its ability to generate tangible outcomes that shift a continent's development trajectory. Its emphasis on self-reliance, regional integration, and green economies positions it as a transformative framework with

⁵⁹ Chipaike, Knowledge, & Richard, 2018.

⁶⁰ Fisher, 2018.

⁶¹ African Union, n.d.

⁶² Kamau et al., 2018.

the potential to challenge the existing global paradigms. Alas, the eclipsing of such initiatives, whether purposefully or unconsciously, remains a crass error. One cannot silence the vision of a future for a continent comprising approximately 40% of the world's population in 2100. This is especially important, given that no other continent has yet presented a continental position regarding its development.

As the international system continues to be attacked by the competition between global and local hegemony, a continental agenda serves as a compass and a call for action despite efforts from some actors to stifle, co-opt, or monopolise development. Agenda 2063 as a breakthrough, showcasing Africa's collective agency in shaping discussions on global growth. It highlights a unified vision for the continent, reinforcing Africa's priorities amidst an international system dominated by competing hegemonies. While the AA2063 fostered significant consensus during its formulation, achieving sustained unity in global discussions and actions towards development has been more challenging owing to diverging national interests and external pressures. The challenge remains to translate the symbolic unity of the Agenda 2063 and its plan of action, into consistent, tangible actions that uphold Africa's collective development agenda.

AA2063 should be read as a policy proposal from the continent as a collective exerting its agency in global discussions about development and as a document that supports the continent's historical pursuit of unity, self-determination, and prosperity under Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance.⁶³ Africans influenced the creation of the SDGs.⁶⁴ Ambassador Macharia Kamau of Kenya, as co-chair of the OWG, played a crucial role in ensuring African priorities. Supported by several African states, including Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, the African Group emphasised addressing the unfinished business of the MDGs and aligning SDGs 2030 with Africa's development needs. Their efforts ensured that SDG 2030 was inclusive and addressed Africa's unique challenges, including economic growth, infrastructure development, and industrialisation.

The presentation of a continental agenda breaks with a sense of 'mediocre African agency',⁶⁵ and contests the relegation of Africa to the margins of the global discourse, a cultural curio on the worldwide stage. AA2063 represents another example of an African effort to challenge Africa's position in international development.

The alignment of the AA2063⁶⁶ with the SDGs 2030 underscores Africa's vision of sustainable development and the role of Africans in building global consensus for development. Macharia et al. argued that the co-chairs, including Macharia, a representative from G-77, facilitated this alignment through strategic advocacy, negotiations, and consultations. They engaged extensively with African nations and the least-developed countries, addressing concerns that the unfinished business of the MDGs, such as poverty eradication, healthcare access, education, and gender equality, might be sidelined in the new development framework.⁶⁷ To build trust and consensus, the co-chairs assured stakeholders that these critical issues would form the core of SDGs. These efforts required balancing

⁶³ African Union, 2015a.

⁶⁴ Kamau et al., 2018 in their book *"Transforming Multilateral Diplomacy: The Inside Story of the Sustainable Development Goals"* provide a comprehensive examination of the SDGs and Africa's critical role in their development and implementation. The authors argue that Africa's involvement in the SDG process was pivotal, yet fraught with challenges and opportunities that have significantly shaped both the continent's development trajectory and the broader global agenda.

⁶⁵ This refers to the inclination of some African leaders to seek legitimacy through external references, or external validation, often participating in initiatives organized beyond their borders or ignoring the ideas of their fellow Africans.

⁶⁶ African Union, 2015a.

⁶⁷ Kamau et al., 2018.

the interests of diverse actors while ensuring that Africa's vision remained visible and influential in shaping the final SDG framework.

The African Agenda and the CAP served as inputs for shaping the broader international development landscape. By presenting collective positions and development plans such as CAP and AA2063, Africans positioned the continent not as passive recipients of global policies but as active participants in shaping the priorities of global agendas. These priorities were further championed in negotiations to ensure they were reflected in the SDG agenda.

The influence of AA2063 was also significant in shaping the specific SDG targets. Its focus on inclusive growth, climate resilience, and gender equality was directly expressed in goals such as SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 13 (climate action), and SDG 5 (gender equality). Additionally, the emphasis on self-reliance and regional partnerships in AA2063 is aligned with the SDGs' commitment to global partnerships for sustainable development (SDG 17). The positive outcomes of this alignment include the successful integration of Africa-specific goals into the SDGs, thereby giving global recognition to the continent's development priorities. The contributions from Africa not only advanced Africa's interests for a more comprehensive and capable understanding of development but also enriched the SDGs by grounding them in diverse, context-specific perspectives essential for equitable global development. Agenda 2063, by prioritising the unique challenges and opportunities of the African continent, supports the mutual conversation and alignment of regional goals with broader current and future global sustainable development objectives.

SDGs 2030 and AA2063 share two critical common denominators. The first aspect is sustainable development and transformation. The second is their ambition to allow all human beings to fulfil their full potential, ensure respect for their dignity and equality, and live in a healthy environment. Thus, the resonance between the two agendas is undeniable.⁶⁸ Table 2 shows a brief comparison of SDGs 2030 goals and AA2063 aspirations.

⁶⁸ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2016.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of SDGs 2030 and AA2063 Aspirations

Aspect	SDGs 2030	AA2063
Core Themes	End poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all through sustainable development.	Achieve an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa, driven by its citizens and representing a dynamic force globally.
Development Vision	A universal agenda addressing global challenges with a focus on leaving no one behind.	A continental agenda rooted in Pan-African ideals, addressing Africa's unique socio-economic and political contexts.
Goals/Aspirations	17 Goals	7 Aspirations
Indicators	Global Indicators include percentage reduction in extreme poverty, maternal mortality ratios, and carbon emissions reductions.	Agenda 2063 has 20 goals, and 39 priority areas, with specific targets and indicators for effective results-based management.
Development Strategies	Emphasis on international cooperation, multilateral agreements, and partnerships for resource mobilisation, technological transfer, and capacity-building.	Prioritisation of regional integration, self-reliance, and Pan-African initiatives like AfCFTA, AU peace mechanisms, and infrastructure development (e.g., high-speed rail networks).
Governance of Implementation	Global governance mechanisms under UN agencies, with national governments responsible for integrating SDG targets into their policies.	Led by the African Union, with periodic review mechanisms and collaboration among African governments to monitor and evaluate progress.
Key Outcomes	Progress varies across regions; extreme poverty rates have declined globally, but inequality and climate challenges persist.	Advances in regional integration (e.g., AfCFTA implementation) and infrastructure projects, though those aspirations remain unrealised.

Source: Authors elaboration.

The monitoring frameworks for SDGs 2030 and AA2063 differ significantly, reflecting their unique scopes and priorities.

The SDG's employs a globally standardised set of 231 indicators to measure progress uniformly across 193 UN member states. These indicators focus on universal metrics such as reducing extreme poverty, improving access to quality education, and mitigating climate change. Although this standardisation ensures comparability across nations, it often lacks the specificity to address regional and local contexts, particularly those unique to Africa.

By contrast, AA2063 incorporates a more tailored approach, with progress measured through Africa-specific metrics that reflect the continent's unique challenges and aspirations. For example, AA2063 includes indicators such as percentage growth in intra-African trade, development of key infrastructure projects (e.g., high-speed rail networks), and progress in industrialisation and regional integration. These indicators align with the agenda's focus on self-reliance, economic transformation, and sustainable development, specific to Africa's historical and socioeconomic realities.

The governance structures that support these monitoring processes also differ. The SDGs rely on national governments for reporting and are overseen by UN agencies that aggregate data for global assessments. While this framework fosters global coherence, it may underrepresent Africa-specific priorities unless governments emphasise them in their national plans. AA2063, on the other hand, is monitored through the African Union's periodic review mechanisms, which provide a platform for member states to assess progress collectively and collaboratively address regional challenges. This approach reinforces African ownership of the development process, ensuring the continent's unique priorities remain central to its agenda.

Moreover, the indicators of the SDGs tend to emphasise outcomes at a global level, such as reductions in extreme poverty and carbon emissions, whereas AA2063 focuses on outcomes tied to continental transformation. For instance, while both frameworks aim to address poverty, AA2063 emphasises regional strategies, such as fostering economic integration through the AfCFTA, directly contributing to Africa-specific growth goals.

Despite their distinct contexts and scopes, SDGs 2030 and AA2063 share essential similarities in monitoring progress, reflecting their mutual commitment to accountability and sustainable development. Both frameworks emphasise measurable indicators to track progress and ensure that development goals translate into tangible outcomes. These indicators focus on key areas, such as poverty eradication, gender equality, access to education, and climate resilience, demonstrating a shared understanding of the critical pillars for global and regional transformation.

Another significant similarity lies in their reliance on member states to report progress. The UN and the AU encourage governments to incorporate development targets into national policies and submit periodic reviews. This shared reliance on national implementation ensures that progress is assessed using local data while aligning with broader regional or global benchmarks. For instance, both frameworks monitor poverty reduction, with the SDGs tracking the percentage of people living below the international poverty line and AA2063 focusing on similar metrics within Africa-specific contexts.

Both agendas also emphasise partnerships and collaboration as essential components of monitoring and implementation. The SDGs rely on multilateral agreements and international cooperation, while AA2063 promotes regional partnerships under the leadership of the African Union. These collaborative approaches recognise the interconnected nature of development challenges and the need for collective action to achieve sustainable outcomes.

The alignment between AA2063 and SDGs 2030 goes beyond mere coexistence; it reflects a commitment to collaborative action and development as a collective effort. The interconnectedness between these agendas allows for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing pressing global challenges, recognising the intricate linkages between the well-being of African nations and the planet's overall health.

5. Conclusion

African perspectives are wielding a newfound influence and reshaping the narrative in international forums. At the heart of this geopolitical shift, AA2063 is a symbolic and political statement of Africa's collective vision for a prosperous, integrated, and peaceful continent by 2063. Realising this vision requires inclusive development processes prioritising regional integration, sustainable economic growth, good governance, and social equity. AA2063 is a strategic framework that guides collaborative efforts in infrastructure development, education, trade, and innovation while fostering Africa-led solutions in global narratives and debates.

This paper examined the role of AA2063 and other initiatives in informing the SDGs. This document highlights the significant interplay between SDGs 2030, and AA2063. AA2063 provided valuable insights and frameworks that informed the SDG discussions, ensuring that Africa's voice was heard globally. AA2063 emerged as a crucial framework, aligning Africa's priorities with the post-2015 development agenda and ensuring that the SDGs 2030 reflected Africa's unique challenges and aspirations. However, while SDGs highlight global development targets, they offer limited guidance on the processes needed to achieve them, leaving countries to determine their strategies and monitor progress. As many nations began to fall behind these goals, AA2063 has provided a more context-specific roadmap for Africa, emphasising regional integration, structural transformation, and homegrown solutions to drive sustainable development across the continent.

AA2063 was presented as a strategic vision for the continent's socioeconomic transformation over 50 years, promoting unity, progress, and prosperity. AA2063 outlines a clear vision of a prosperous, integrated, and peaceful continent driven by its citizens. It emphasises key pillars, such as inclusive economic growth, political unity, good governance, cultural identity, and environmental sustainability. To achieve this, AA2063 promotes strategies such as regional infrastructure development, investment in science and technology, youth and women empowerment, intra-African trade through the AfCFTA, and conflict prevention. This region-specific approach fosters self-reliance and positions Africa as an active player in shaping global development agendas.

Despite clear challenges, such as the impact of civil wars, international conflicts, climate breakdown, and geopolitical tensions posing potential threats to developmental gains, countries within the continent continue their quest for their development trajectories. Continental initiatives such as AA2063 are poised to shape the continent's destiny and exert considerable influence on the broader global agenda for a fairer and more equitable world.

This paper highlights the substantial interplay between Agenda 2063 and the SDGs, arguing that, while African perspectives are increasingly present in global development discourse, their acknowledgment and integration remains partial and uneven. AA2063 illustrates Africa's growing agency in shaping global agendas; however, the extent to which AA2063 has been fully embedded in international policy frameworks requires further examination. Understanding how African-driven strategies influence global development beyond 2030 is central to advancing more inclusive and representative global governance, a crucial area for future research, and the future of development.

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