United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Towards an Effective and Agile Development Planning Institutional Architecture in Africa

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1. Introduction

Development planning has seen a resurgence in recent years, and continues to be a significant part of the policymaking landscape of African countries (Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro, 2019). In developing countries characterized by pervasive institutional weaknesses and market failures, such planning can serve as a transformative tool for sustainable development. Indeed, planning is immensely useful for African countries, with a 2016 study showing that development indicators tended to be higher in periods of development planning compared with periods when planning was not done (United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, 2016).

Notwithstanding the acknowledged benefits of national development planning, there have been periods of acceptance and pushback. In the 1950s and 1960s, national development plans were a symbol of national sovereignty, and many countries developed them. The popularity of such planning waned in the 1970s and 1980s, however, due in part to its apparent failure to produce desired results. The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a resurgence in planning as economic theory became more favourable to certain types of State intervention. There was a recognition of the relevance of Governments in coordinating development activity, promoting structural transformation and addressing market failures. In line with this thinking, the number of countries with a national development plan more than doubled from 62 in 2006 to 134 in 2018 (Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro, 2019).

Nevertheless, the implementation of national development plans in Africa has not been without its challenges, which include weak coordination of relevant planning entities around a shared vision, systemic disconnects among national, subnational and sectoral planning frameworks, weak links between annual budgets and the medium-term plan, lack of political will, political instability, weak statistical systems and limited capacity to monitor and evaluate performance. In recent times, these challenges have been compounded by an increasingly complex and uncertain global landscape characterized by rapid technological innovations, extreme weather events and elevated debt vulnerabilities, exacerbated by polycrises such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

To overcome these challenges, successful implementation of development planning frameworks requires a robust institutional architecture, strong horizontal and vertical coordination, and clarity of roles. In practice, the planning architecture varies in effectiveness and structure across countries. Identifying the appropriate architecture requires an understanding of a country's context and the workings of the planning systems that are already in place. Based on such information, countries can then adapt best practices to their local contexts.

While development planning is not a panacea that would improve development outcomes, effective planning does lend itself to positive economic and development outcomes. In light of an increasingly complex geopolitical economic global landscape, crippling shocks and the need to achieve sustainable and inclusive development, including through a fit-for-purpose and responsive development planning architecture, the present report contains an analysis of some of the tenets of effective development planning and includes proposals for policy directions for African economies.

The study is based in part on nine country case studies to highlight international best practices in planning and includes a menu of reform-oriented proposals to enhance the efficacy of planning. The nine case countries have different institutional settings and varied strengths and weaknesses. Some countries (such as Ghana) have made good progress in institutionalizing planning at the district and local level, while others (such as the Republic of Korea) have demonstrated strong leadership and commitment to planning, as well as success in securing the buy-in of key stakeholders, in particular the private sector. Indonesia has been successful in ensuring a participatory approach to budgeting, and the *Imihigo* system in Rwanda has demonstrated success in promoting accountability through performance contracts. On the other hand, weaknesses include a lack of vertical and horizontal coordination among the different spheres of the planning ecosystem, which results in fragmented systems, limited capacities to track performance, weak links between annual budgets and development priorities and a lack of political will to implement development plans.

The paper is structured as follows: in section 2, the context and evolution of development planning is described, with a focus on the institutional landscape and complexities of planning in Africa; section 3 contains the conceptual framework and methodology of the study, which frames the analysis of country experiences in development planning; section 4 contains a review and distillation of lessons related to planning architecture from the selected country case studies; and section 5 provides a menu of policy options for the development planning architecture of Africa based on global good practices.

2. Background

2.1 Evolution of development planning

There is no single definition of development planning. Broadly speaking, development planning is a means of systematically identifying, articulating, prioritizing and satisfying the economic, environmental and social needs of a country. However, unlike in developed countries, which are characterized by well-functioning institutions and markets, development planning in developing countries is expected to play a more transformative role in addressing institutional weaknesses, correcting market failures, unleashing human capabilities and nurturing a dynamic, diversified, resilient and inclusive economy (United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, 2016).

Building on this foundation, development planning serves as a vital tool for creating resilient economies and societies that are equipped to navigate and adapt to the complexities of contemporary development challenges. Ideally, development plans not only anticipate future scenarios but also promote sustained development and inclusive growth. This is essential for realizing a nation's long-term developmental aspirations and achieving equitable prosperity. The transformative agenda of development planning is thus focused not just on improving current conditions but also on laying down a solid foundation for enduring prosperity and resilience to future challenges (World Bank, 2021).

Notwithstanding the acknowledged benefits of national development planning, there have been periods of acceptance and pushback with regard to such planning. In the 1950s and 1960s, having a national development plan was a symbol of national sovereignty, and many countries developed them. Indeed, the successful deployment of five-year development plans to promote industrialization in the era of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the effectiveness of the Marshall Plan in enabling post-war recovery, ostensibly affirmed the value of planned and interventionist economic policies over free market economies (Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro, 2019; Harrison, June 2023; and Killick, 1983). During this period, national development planning was largely top-down, State-driven and focused on transformational change.

The pioneers of development recognized that, to overcome underdevelopment, planning needed to be both visionary and inclusive, reflecting a society's broader aspirations for growth and self-sufficiency.

As such, development planning provided a strategic framework for transitioning nations from a state of underdevelopment to one of sustained progress and autonomy (Todaro and Smith, 2015).

The popularity of national development planning waned in the 1970s and 1980s, however, due in part to its apparent failure to produce desired results. A study of the national medium-term plans of 13 African countries showed that rates of agricultural growth and per capita gross domestic product growth were less than 80 per cent of set targets. Weaknesses in development planning processes included problems with plan design, weak institutions, excessive bureaucracy, exogenous shocks, data constraints, weak decision-making power of planning institutions, shortages of local planners and political instability (Killick, 1983).

Critics of the development planning process also attributed the failures of planning to government failure and rent-seeking resulting from government intervention (Krueger, 1974). The following statement reflects the frustration with planning at the time: "[w]here planning does not measure up to expectations, which is almost everywhere, planners are handy targets …. If they are supposed to doctor sick societies, the patient never seems to get well. Why can't the planners ever seem to do the right thing?" (Wildavsky, 1973).

In line with this thinking, and in support of their structural adjustment programmes, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund discredited the role of planning and of planning ministries and commissions. Many economic development agencies and national planning agencies "were abolished or merged into ministries of finance, where they became marginalized in terms of status, staffing, budget and relevance to policy" (Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro, 2019, p. 79). A review of the experiences of developing countries in development planning in the post-World War II period found that planning had failed to live up to expectations; consequently, the author of that study called for greater flexibility, selectivity and coordination in the formulation of plans (Agarwala, 1983).

Notwithstanding these critiques, the late 1990s and early 2000s saw a resurgence in planning, as economic theory became more favourable to certain types of State intervention. Indeed, there was a recognition that Governments needed to coordinate development activity, promote structural transformation and address market failures. The number of countries with a national development plan more than doubled from 62 in 2006 to 134 in 2018 (Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro, 2019). Moreover, Asian countries such as China, India and Malaysia never abandoned development planning even as they liberalized their economies. India, for example, abolished its Planning Commission but created the National Institution for Transforming India, which was responsible for developing a shared vision of the country's development priorities (Harrison, 2023).

The introduction of the poverty reduction strategies of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, starting in 1996, lent credence to the benefits of development planning. Poverty reduction strategies resembled national development plans in many ways. They included investment plans, output targets across productive and social sectors, and result matrices. In addition, the poverty reduction strategy approach included "participatory assessments" to ensure that planning was integrated with "good governance" (Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro, 2019, p. 79).

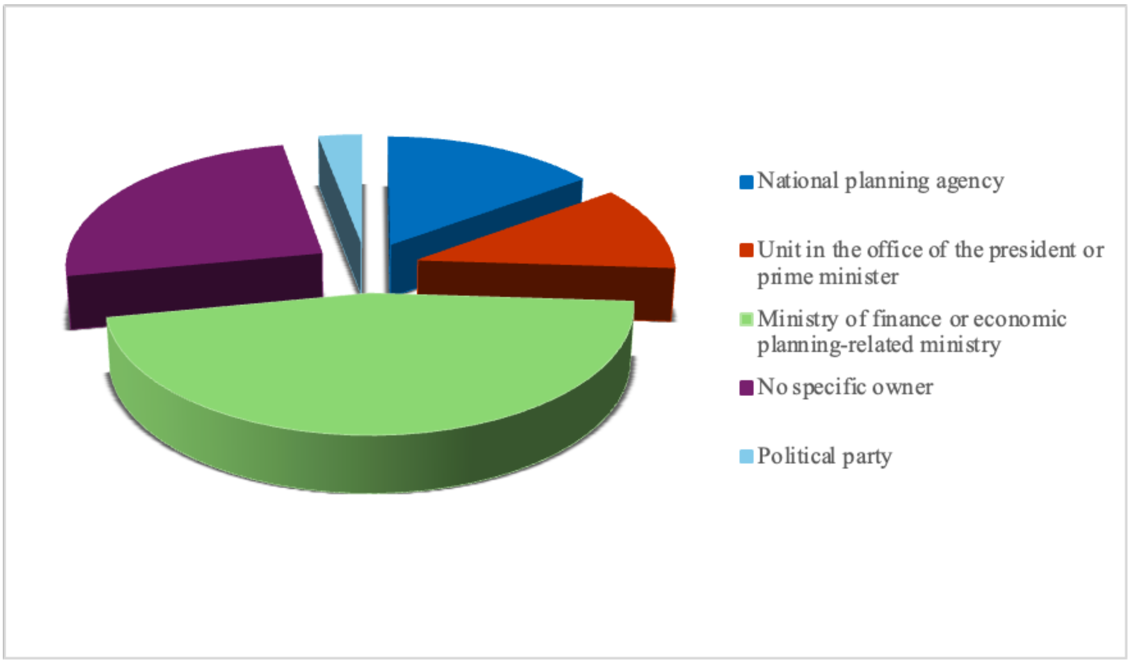
The resurgence in national development planning also benefited from changing economic ideologies and the emergence of global development goals such as the Millennium Development Goals. Governments began using national development plans to implement the Goals and other development aspirations (Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro, 2019, and United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, 2016).

The features of current national development planning differ from the planning approaches of the 1950s to 1970s, however. In this new national planning era, there has been a recognition of the need to be more communicative and collaborative in the planning process. In addition, there has been greater recognition of the influences of uncertainty and contingency, even when rational planning methodologies are adopted (Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro, 2019).

2.2 Institutional architecture of planning in African countries

Regardless of the planning approach, the successful design and implementation of national development plans is highly dependent on the institutional architecture within which planning occurs. In many cases, the central (i.e. national) planning function is located and driven by the ministry of finance, the ministry of economic planning, a national planning commission or a related ministry or entity, such as a national planning agency or a unit in the office of the president or prime minister. These categories are not mutually exclusive. In some cases, the ministries of planning and finance are merged and lead the planning process. In other cases, the national planning commission is subsumed under the highest office (the office of the president or prime minister). According to a survey of 97 national development plans, in most cases the planning function is in the ministry of finance or a ministry responsible for economic planning (Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro, 2019). Nevertheless, the role of leadership in the institutional architecture is vital. Indeed, one school of thought is that, regardless of where institutional responsibility rests, a critical success element in development planning remains a strong leadership commitment, as evidenced by the experience of the Republic of Korea (Kim, 2011).

Figure I: Owners and drivers of national development plans



Source: *Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro (2019).*

National planning structures are generally complemented by subnational, sectoral and spatial planning frameworks, which are in some instances designed and implemented in collaboration with non-State actors, such as civil society, academia and the private sector. National planning entities are generally responsible for the design of long- and medium-term plans, while subnational planning functions are the responsibility of regional and district planning entities, depending on the political structure of the country. In federal systems like Nigeria, for instance, national (i.e. federal) planning authorities are responsible for the design of the vision and the medium-term plan, while the States that comprise the federation lead the design of subnational planning frameworks, which can also be cascaded to local-level planning entities. National and subnational planning frameworks are in turn informed by sectoral and spatial plans, which are undertaken by line ministries at the national and subnational levels.

Long-term plans or visions reflect the aspirations of a country and provide a road map for national, subnational and sectoral planning frameworks. Visions tend to be broad and indicative in nature, while medium-term plans lay out the strategy and actions required to achieve the vision. Depending on the planning system adopted by a country, the medium-term plan or strategy in turn informs and is informed by sectoral and subnational plans. In top-down systems, the design of the strategy is centralized, while bottom-up approaches involve the adoption of a more decentralized approach to the design of the strategy.

2.3 Complexity of planning in African countries

Currently, the planning process is occurring in an increasingly complex global landscape characterized by rapid technological innovation, extreme weather events, conflict, elevated debt vulnerability and fiscal imbalance, exacerbated by polycrises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The interplay of these events has increased pressure on government spending, thrown more households into poverty and derailed progress in the implementation of national development plans. As of June 2023, African countries accounted for 8 of 9 countries in debt distress and 13 of 27 countries at high overall risk of debt distress (World Bank, 2023).

With a growing number of African countries affected by the prolonged effects of the polycrises of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and conflict, increased capacity of planning entities to design and implement integrated planning systems and strategies for inclusive growth and debt sustainability is imperative but even more challenging (United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, July 2023). In this context, integrated development planning frameworks that (a) reflect countries' national, regional and global commitments, (b) are aligned with financing frameworks, (c) appropriately identify catalytic and transformational interventions and (d) are continually tracked and evaluated are vital to the successful implementation of national development plans (United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, July 2023, p. 1).

2.3.1 Fragmented planning ecosystems

In reality, coordinating all the relevant entities in the planning ecosystem around a shared vision is a challenging undertaking. Furthermore, the proliferation of continental and global commitments, such as the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015, Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want of the African Union, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and, more recently, the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, has increased the complexity of the planning process and exposed fragilities, fragmentation and incoherence in the planning architecture of several African countries.

Specifically, systemic disconnects persist in all phases of the planning ecosystem: the long-term vision, the medium-term plan, sectoral plans, subnational plans and spatial plans. An institutional architecture that is well capacitated, anchored by the realities of a country, responsive to changing circumstances and empowered to execute its mandates is vital for ensuring an integrated, well-coordinated and coherent planning ecosystem.

2.3.2 An inhospitable planning design and implementation environment

Even the most well-crafted development plans are unlikely to succeed without an enabling environment, appropriate institutional capacities and resources to implement the plan. Indeed, discontinuities in plan implementation, misalignment in planning and political cycles, weak institutional capacities, weak links between resource allocation and development priorities and overdependence on external resources have played a critical role in undermining the implementation of development plans in Africa (United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, 2016). Strengthening and improving planning processes and instruments will contribute to the optimal achievement of development goals.

The next section sets out the conceptual framework and methodology of the study, including the criteria for the selected case study countries, which have been designed to develop a typology of development planning frameworks and to identify the salient features and preconditions for effective development planning.

3. Conceptual framework and methodology

3.1 Conceptual framework

The analysis of 103 countries by Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro divides national development plans into four types, based on four criteria:

- Do the countries use a top-down or a bottom-up approach?
- Do they have a rational blueprint or communicative rationality?
- How strong is the evidence base that is used to develop the plans?
- Are the plans socially embedded or not?

Accordingly, the definitions of the four types of national development plans are as follows:

- Type A: top-down, expert-led plans with a strong evidence base but limited social embeddedness
- Type B: bottom-up, collaboratively created plans with a strong evidence base and high social embeddedness
- Type C: top-down plans, disjointed and with a weak evidence base and limited social embeddedness
- Type D: bottom-up plans with a weak evidence base and limited social embeddedness.
- As shown in table 1, a plurality of countries (42 per cent) developed plans that utilize a largely bottom-up process, have communicative rationality and strong evidence bases and are socially embedded.

Table 1: Functional classification of types of national development plans

Type A (26 per cent) Largely top-down process Rational blueprint Strong evidence base Limited social embeddedness	Type B (42 per cent) Largely bottom-up process Communicative rationality Strong evidence base Socially embedded
Type C (12 per cent) Largely top-down process Disjointed blueprint Weak evidence base Limited social embeddedness	Type D (20 per cent) Largely bottom-up process Communicative rationality Weak evidence base Socially embedded

Source: *Analysis by Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro, 2019.*

Building on this analysis and drawing on country-level experiences, it is possible to identify some of the defining features of an effective development plan. These features serve as a conceptual framework for benchmarking best practices in development planning and conform largely with the type B classification of Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro (2019). They may be summarized as follows:

(a). Stakeholder engagement and participation/participatory approaches: Participatory approaches foster ownership, inclusivity and responsiveness to diverse needs and priorities. Following seminal works such as Chambers (1997), and the capability approach described in Sen (1999) on development approaches more broadly, effective national development planning should involve the active participation of stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector actors and local communities. Engaging stakeholders in the planning process fosters ownership, promotes inclusivity and ensures that development priorities reflect the needs and aspirations of diverse groups within society. For instance, participatory consultation through "forums for policy dialogues" and "industry committees" related to the planning process is credited with contributing to the development planning success of the Republic of Korea (Kim, 2011);

(b). Integrated and coherent strategies: Development planning systems that strengthen vertical and horizontal synergies tend to promote coherence and are more effective in addressing interconnected development challenges. For instance, at the vertical level, aligning global, continental, national and subnational development priorities creates a virtuous cycle of mutually reinforcing initiatives. Similarly, horizontal synergies are strengthened through improved intersectoral and subnational coordination and alignment with national financing frameworks. This approach fosters holistic developmental outcomes and minimizes trade-offs between competing objectives. In Indonesia, for instance, all political parties and presidential candidates must ensure that their priority programmes are aligned with long-and medium-term plans and are developed in reference to the technocratic draft of the country's medium-term development plan (Indonesia, National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas), 2023);

(c). Evidence-based policy formulation: Decision-making in national development planning should be informed by rigorous analysis and evidence. Evidence-based policy formulation enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions, leading to more sustainable outcomes. This involves conducting comprehensive assessments of development challenges, collecting relevant data and information, and applying analytical tools to identify root causes, drivers and potential solutions. It also promotes flexibility and agility in the planning process by assisting countries to nimbly adjust their strategies and interventions based on emerging evidence and changing circumstances. However, as noted in Davies, Nutley, and Smith (2000) and indicated above, evidence must include stakeholder perspectives and factor in the non-linear, interlinked nature of policy and practice;

(d). **Robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms:** Closely related to the point above, robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are crucial for tracking progress, assessing impact and learning from experiences (Patton, 2010). Appropriately designed and executed monitoring and evaluation systems positively influence policymaking, performance budgeting and national planning by providing a metric for performance assessment, enhancing transparency and accountability and influencing corrective policy changes (Mackay, 2007). As such, national plans should establish clear indicators, benchmarks, targets and evaluation mechanisms to track implementation, evaluate effectiveness and measure impact effectively. In Chile, the use of monitoring and evaluation information in government decision-making processes is considered an international example of best practice, in particular in relation to informing budgeting decisions (Mackay, 2007);

(e). **Institutional capacity:** In a context of limited capacity, capacity development is essential for the effective implementation of national development plans. This involves investing in strengthening government institutions, enhancing technical skills and expertise, improving coordination mechanisms and promoting accountability to ensure successful plan execution (UNDP, 2009). Capacity-building should also focus on empowering local institutions;

(f). **Resilience and risk management:** As emphasized in United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa (14 November 2023), developing countries in particular face a myriad of risks and uncertainties, including economic shocks, natural disasters and climate change impacts. Accordingly, national development planning should incorporate strategies for building resilience and managing risks effectively. This may involve integrating risk assessment and mitigation measures into development policies, investing in disaster preparedness and response mechanisms and promoting adaptive strategies to cope with environmental and socioeconomic challenges. Forecast planning and scenario-based planning are also important to enable plan prioritization and flexibility in the face of uncertainties;

(g). **Building on broader development frameworks:** Similar to the Millennium Development Goals before them, the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by States Members of the United Nations in 2015, provide a comprehensive framework for addressing key development challenges. Similarly, Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want of the African Union provides a holistic vision for that continent's development. Developing countries can use the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2063 and similar agendas as guiding frameworks, and align their national development plans with specific targets and indicators to track progress over time. This alignment ensures a focus on holistic development, encompassing economic, social and environmental dimensions.

3.2 Scope and methodology

The analysis for the present paper has been informed by extensive desk reviews and complemented, when possible, by the views of country-level experts. The purpose of the desk reviews was to identify relevant good practices in development planning that could inform planning ecosystems in Africa. The initial motivation for the paper was a request for the United Nations to provide technical support to a newly established ministry of planning by an African Member State. The United Nations provided support through the provision of case study analysis and policy recommendations that could strengthen the effectiveness of the planning institutions in the country. Led by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the report benefited from the input of several organizations under the Africa opportunity and issue-based coalitions, which were identified as the best platform to provide this support.

For the study, nine countries in four regions were selected as benchmark countries based on their system of government, their income status and distinctive features of their planning system (see table 2). Some of the countries, such as Canada and the Republic of Korea, have demonstrated positive development outcomes using approaches that may be of relevance to African countries, but even the unsuccessful development planning initiatives of some of these countries can be instructive lessons for others.

Table 2: Criteria for country selection

Region/country	Political system	Income status	Distinguishing feature
Africa			
Botswana	Unitary	Upper-middle-income	• Transparency and accountability
Ethiopia	Federal	Low-income	• Rapid growth
Ghana	Unitary	Low-middle-income	• Strong decentralized planning system
Nigeria	Federal	Low-middle-income	• Combines budget and planning functions
Rwanda	Unitary	Low-income	• Strong accountability (Imihigo) system • Promotion of gender equality
Asia			
Indonesia	Unitary	Low-middle-income	• Accountable inclusive and consultative planning system (e-Musrenbang)
Republic of Korea	Unitary	High-income	• Strong leadership • Rapid and diversified growth
South America			
Brazil	Federal	Upper-middle-income	• Strong social protection system • Combines budget and planning functions
North America			
Canada	Federal	High-income	• Strong healthcare system • Strong social protection system

4. A synthesis of country experiences and lessons

The present section distils lessons from the case study countries, which can inform effective development planning processes and promote effective institutions in Africa. The first part of the analysis provides a snapshot of the strengths and weaknesses of the planning architecture of the case study countries (see table 3). Drawing on the conceptual framework, the report examines how the studied countries perform in relation to key development planning benchmarks and challenges.

4.1 Case country profiles

The nine case countries have different institutional settings and varied strengths and weaknesses. As an introduction to the countries, table 3 below sets out the structure of the respective planning institutions, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the planning architecture, of the selected countries.

Some countries (such as Ghana) have made good progress in institutionalizing planning at the district and local levels, while others (such as the Republic of Korea) demonstrate strong leadership and commitment to planning, as well as success in securing the buy-in of key stakeholders, in particular the private sector. Indonesia has been successful in ensuring a participatory approach to budgeting, and the *Imihigo* system of Rwanda has demonstrated success in promoting accountability through performance contracts. On the other hand, weaknesses include a lack of vertical and horizontal coordination among the different spheres of the planning ecosystem, resulting in fragmented systems, limited capacities to track performance, weak links between annual budgets and development priorities and a lack of political will to implement development plans. The latter is manifested by the fact that the leaders of some planning institutions do not hold cabinet-level positions, which renders them politically weak. These shared traits underscore the complexities inherent in effective planning and implementation strategies globally.

Table 3: Strengths and weaknesses in the planning architecture of selected countries

Country	Lead planning institution	Strengths	Weaknesses
Botswana	National Planning Commission	• Integrated results-based management planning approach underlies national development plans to ensure that projects and programmes are results-oriented	• Failure to respond and adapt to achieve the needed structural transformation • Implementation challenges stemming from the misalignment of the national planning cycle with the national electoral cycle • Widening misalignment between district planning and national development planning • Lack of robustness, fragmentation and a resultant lack of accountability in the monitoring and evaluation of plans, policies, projects and programmes
Brazil	Ministry of Planning and Budget, which formulates the multiannual plan, a medium-term (four-year) planning instrument mandated by the federal Constitution	• Strong commitment to the global Sustainable Development Goal agenda through the 2030 sustainable development plan of the Brazilian Development Association • Integration of planning and budget functions	• Delineation of government roles between the federal level and the States is sometimes ambiguous, leading to potential overlaps and confusion • Political instability, which undermines policy coherence • Limited funding for key actors
Canada	Privy Council Office	• Economic stability, social welfare and exemplary healthcare and educational systems	• Data gaps persist • Misalignment and lack of collaboration across different layers of government • Challenges in inclusive engagement for marginalized groups
Ethiopia	Ministry of Planning and Development, which prepares long- and medium-term plans and a spatial development framework	• The planning institution has strong support from the Office of the Prime Minister • The establishment of a single institution with clear powers and mandates to lead and coordinate the planning process	• Horizontal coordination across different sectors, especially during the implementation of development plans, has remained problematic • Federal-regional interface during both plan preparation and plan implementation has remained an unsettled issue, as regions have autonomy in terms of designing and implementing their plans • A weak database management system is impeding the development of monitoring and evaluation systems for sectors

Country	Lead planning institution	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ghana	National Development Planning Commission	• Institutionalization of planning practice across sectors and districts	• Overlap of the Commission's mandate with that of the Ministry of Finance, and insufficient interface between the budget allocation process and medium- to long-term development planning • The tenure of both the chair and the commissioners of Commission are aligned to the political cycle, which can result in a complete overhaul when a new administration is elected • Disconnect between party manifestos, the long-term development plan and the Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies • Commission is not represented at the cabinet level, where executive decisions are made • The large number (48) of commissioners serving on the Commission undermines effectiveness • As an advisory organ to the executive and legislative branches, the Commission has an authority that is non-binding
Indonesia	Ministry of National Development Planning/ National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas)	• Presidential and vice-presidential candidates are required to align their vision, mission and priority programmes (political manifestos) to the medium-term development plan • Minister of National Development Planning holds a prominent position in the cabinet • The electronic budgeting and planning (e-Musrenbang) system facilitates a consultative planning process on programme and budget planning • Adoption of electronic budgeting and planning provides a digital platform for citizen input to the programme and budget allocation process	• Disconnect between development priorities and programmes
Nigeria	Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning (formerly the National Planning Commission)	• The Joint Planning Board, the National Council on Development Planning and the National Economic Council coordinate to harmonize planning frameworks • The Development Plan Implementation Unit facilitates implementation • Inclusive planning	• Lack of coordination within the Ministry and between the Ministry and State and local planning entities • Perceived inequities in revenue-sharing between different tiers of government • Overambitious development plans • Lack of commitment and continuity of plans

Country	Lead planning institution	Strengths	Weaknesses
Republic of Korea	Economic Planning Board	• Five-year plan for balanced national growth (2004-2008) and comprehensive national territorial plans reduce inequalities • Integrated plans that support both local decentralization and balanced development • Flexibility: shift from top-down to bottom-up planning as the economy grew and the development landscape changed • Creation of "forums for policy dialogues" and "industry committees" to facilitate the sharing of vision, goals, buy-in and implementation • Institutionalization of revised plans produced by the Board • Combining planning and resource mobilization functions within the Board • A strong Board headed by the Deputy Prime Minister • Strong committed leadership • Monthly meetings convened with key stakeholders	
Rwanda	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, which is the central coordinating body responsible for overall economic planning and budgeting	• Performance contracts, known as Imihigo, strengthen accountability	

4.2 Lessons in development planning from case countries

The development planning experiences of the nine case countries offer rich lessons for the continent, in particular in terms of the institutional roles and responsibilities of planning entities, leadership and commitment, coordination and integrated planning, accountability and inclusion, and flexibility and adaptability. By drawing on these lessons and adapting them to each country's unique context, African countries can enhance their development planning frameworks and strategies to achieve sustainable growth and development.

4.2.1 Institutional roles and responsibilities in development planning

Central planning entities, i.e. the entities tasked with leading the planning process, are key to the successful implementation of national, subnational and sectoral development plans. They play a key role in coordinating sectoral and subnational plans and facilitating the alignment of such frameworks to development financing, as well as to the continental and global commitments of a country. The location of the central planning entity, its prominence and power in the government machinery, and the robustness of the legal frameworks that underpin its existence are all important determinants of effectiveness.

The present analysis finds that institutional architecture is dynamic and varies across countries. For instance, with respect to the location of the central planning agencies, Brazil, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Nigeria and the Republic of Korea separate planning functions from the ministry of finance, while both functions are merged in Rwanda. The central planning functions in Botswana and Ghana are undertaken by the national planning commission, while the planning functions in Ethiopia, Indonesia and Nigeria are undertaken by dedicated line ministries. The Republic of Korea, on the other hand, has located its central planning entity in the Office of the Prime Minister.

Countries continue to experiment with finding the ideal location for the central planning entity. For instance, in Ethiopia the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development and the Ministry of Planning and Development merged to form the Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation in 2010. In Ghana, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economic Planning merged to form the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning in 2001. They then separated in 2009 to form the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economic Planning. Similarly, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning of Kenya merged to form the Ministry of Planning and National Development in 2008, only to separate back into the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning in 2013. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economic Planning of South Africa merged to form the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning in 1994, which reverted to being separate ministries in 2001. Similarly, countries have transitioned from national planning commissions to line ministries and other entities. For instance, the Federal Ministry of Budget and Planning of Nigeria was formerly a national planning commission. Likewise, India replaced its Planning Commission with the National Institution for Transforming India, an entity responsible for development planning.

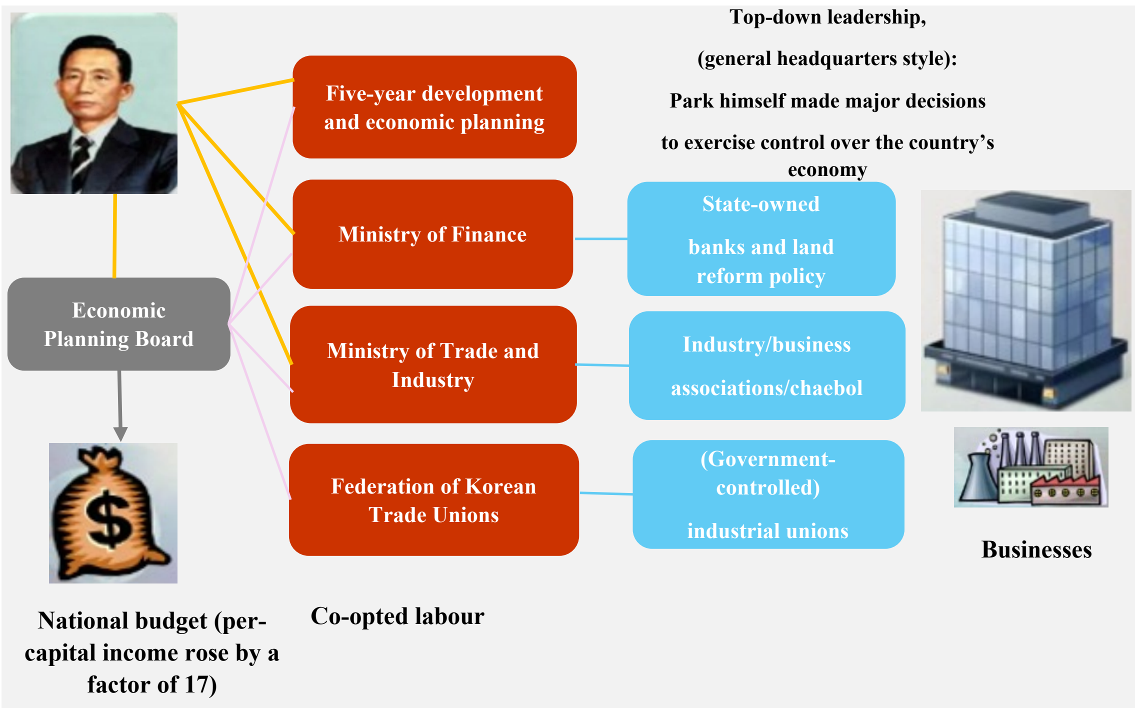
The tendency for countries to continually change the location of their central planning entity may suggest dissatisfaction with its operational effectiveness and the perception that getting the location right is key to planning effectiveness. This raises a fundamental question, however: how important is location in determining the effectiveness of planning institutions?

4.2.2 Strong leadership commitment

Beyond location, the prominence of development planning, political backing for it and the commitment of leadership to such planning may be critical predictors of the effectiveness of central planning entities. The case studies highlight the important role of strong commitment by leadership to the planning process in enhancing plan implementation. In this context, the East Asian countries exemplify strong leadership and commitment to planning. In Indonesia, the Minister of National Development Planning holds a prominent position in the cabinet. In the Republic of Korea, former President Park Chung-hee demonstrated strong leadership by placing the central planning entity, the Economic Planning Board, under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister and combining planning and finance functions into a "super ministry". Strong political leadership strengthened policy implementation, enhanced oversight of government officials and minimized rent-seeking. The Board played an essential role in policy coordination and in allocating domestic and foreign capital to development priorities. This function enhanced the alignment of development financing to development priorities. Since the head of the Board, the Deputy Prime Minister, presided over economic committees and ministerial meetings, the Board had significant oversight and could shape the interests of all stakeholders and enhance the linkage between the aspirations in the plans undertaken and their implementation.

Through the Economic Planning Board, political leadership concentrated information and power related to implementing the five-year economic development plans. Two types of monthly meetings – the monthly export promotion meetings and the monthly economic trends meetings – contributed to the implementation of policies through strong leadership and commitment (see box 1). Out of a total of 152 monthly export promotion meetings held between February 1965 and the end of 1979, President Park missed only 5 meetings. He also missed 1 of the 147 monthly export promotion meetings (Han, Seunghee, and Kang, Tai-Hyuk (2014)).

Figure II: Top-down leadership of the Republic of Korea during the era of five-year economic development plans



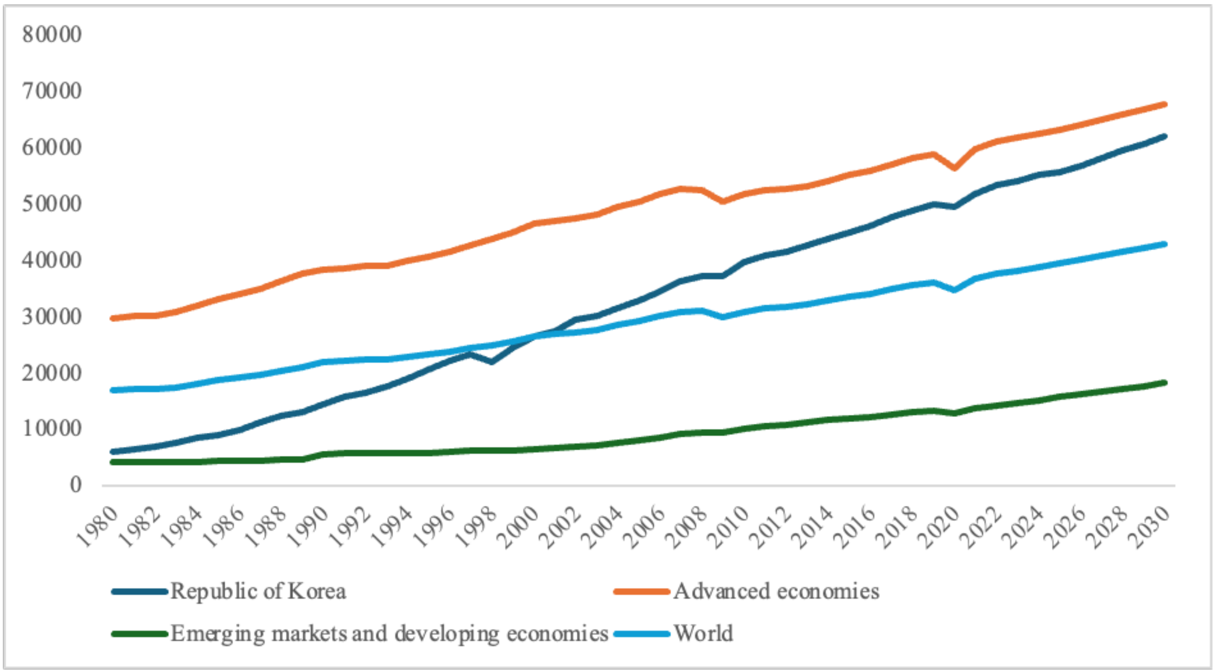
Source: *Based on the work of Kim (2011).*

Box 1: Monthly meetings under President Park

There were two distinct categories of monthly meetings that significantly helped in the implementation of policies and demonstrated strong commitment to leadership. The monthly economic trends meeting was initiated by President Park in 1963 with the initial purpose of providing comprehensive economic and trend-related information to military authorities. The participants – ministers, senior officials, representatives of the Bank of Korea and private enterprises, and economists – deliberated on economic matters. The monthly export promotion meetings were convened with the objective of advocating for export-oriented policies and overseeing export performance. The participants deliberated on the all-encompassing strategy for enhancing exports and identified and resolved the obstacles encountered by export enterprises. The meetings functioned as a stimulus for the private sector by mitigating uncertainties and eliciting prompt policy reactions (Kim, 2011).

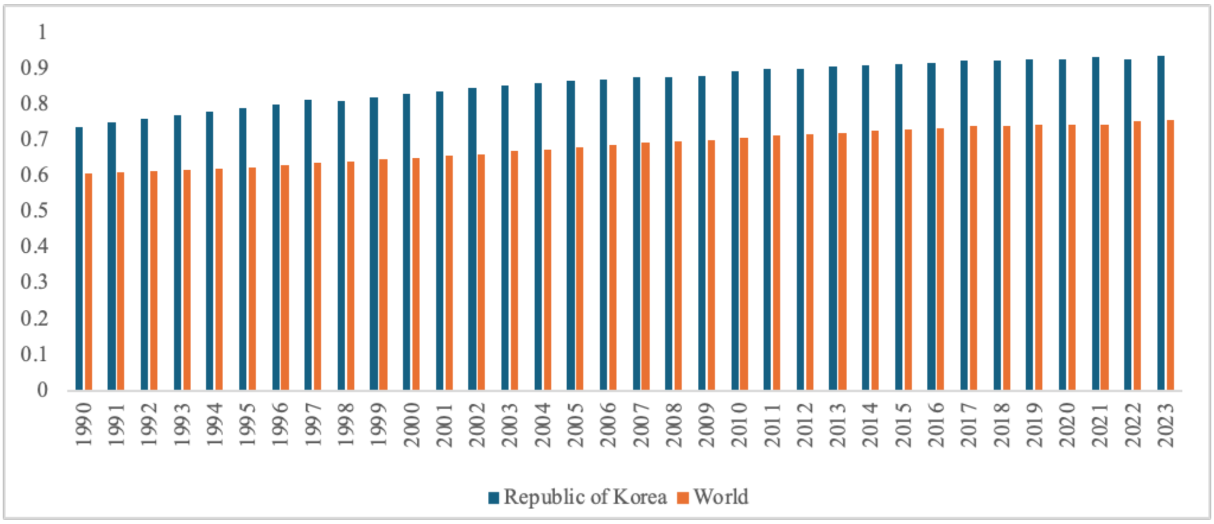
President Park understood the importance of achieving economic growth to enable the advancement of development outcomes. Declaring the economic progress of the Republic of Korea as his primary goal, President Park achieved significant industrial progress during his time in power (Khaled, 2007). His oversight and the workings of the Economic Planning Board were therefore crucial in advancing the country's economy and development. Figure II shows significant growth during the implementation of the five-year plans between 1962 and 1996. The Republic of Korea has also achieved human development targets that were higher than the global average (see figure III).

Figure III: Gross domestic product per capita of the Republic of Korea, 1980–2030



Source: *International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook database, 2025 (available data).*

Figure IV: Human development index of the Republic of Korea, 1990-2023



Source: *United Nations Development Programme Human Development Reports (available data as of 2025).*

In contrast to the experience of the Republic of Korea, the planning system of Ghana highlights the inherent weakness of establishing a constitutionally mandated National Development Planning Commission without according the entity representation at the cabinet level, where executive decisions are made. Furthermore, as an advisory organ to the executive and the legislative arms of the State, the Commission's decisions are non-binding. In the context of a relatively weak National Development Planning Commission, the Ministry of Finance is the super ministry in Ghana, and its decisions hold greater sway in the execution of the country's planning system. This comes at a cost, however, since long-term planning is held hostage to the short-term fiscal imperatives and priorities of the Ministry of Finance.

In the Africa region, Ethiopia is an example of a country where the planning institution is separate from the Office of the Prime Minister yet has strong support from that Office. This provides additional strength in terms of coordinating the planning process. Ethiopia is also an example of a country where the planning institution has clear powers and mandates to lead and coordinate the planning process.

In Botswana, effective leadership and strong governance have enabled the country to avoid the famed "Dutch disease" that affects countries that have significant natural resources. The Government has prevented this by building a surplus in the current account of its balance of payments, prioritizing fiscal savings and encouraging huge public investments in infrastructure and human capital. In addition, the Government has established respect for the rule of law and property rights. Furthermore, it has maintained a high level of transparency, reinforced by the traditional consultative process called ***kgotla***. ***Kgotla*** is a Tswana tribal consultative tradition which has created a level of trust in the Government and promoted the notion that the Government is there to serve the people and not act in the self-interest of an individual or group of people (Lewin, 2011).

4.2.3 Coordination and integrated planning

Strengthening synergies among the vertical and horizontal spheres of the planning ecosystem is key to the coherent implementation of national development plans. The creation of coordination entities in Nigeria (such as the Joint Planning Board, the Council on Development Planning and the National Economic Council) to foster coordination across the different layers of planning is a positive development, although implementation gaps remain, as the planning system is still plagued by coordination gaps within the Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning and between the Ministry and State and local planning entities. While this challenge is not unique to Nigeria, it appears to be magnified in federal systems of government in general. For instance, the study found that the federal systems of Brazil and Canada are also plagued by coordination challenges.

The Republic of Korea strengthened coherence between national, subnational and spatial planning frameworks by developing comprehensive national territorial plans, which comprise a layered structure of building frameworks at the national (the comprehensive national territorial plan), provincial (the comprehensive provincial plan) and city (the comprehensive city-level plan) levels. In addition, the country developed regional plans and sector plans for specific regions and sectors. Its five-year plan for balanced national growth (2004-2008) and comprehensive national territorial plans reduced inequalities and facilitated integrated plans that supported both local decentralization and balanced development.

In Ghana, a strong tradition of subnational planning is a positive lesson for other countries. The National Development Planning Commission is mandated by the National Development Planning (Systems) Act, 1994 (Act 480), to coordinate the country's decentralized development planning system. The Commission also spells out the planning functions of district and regional coordinating bodies, ministries and sector agencies, and the functions of the Commission in relation to the development plans of these entities. This includes prescribing the format and content of plans, coordinating district plans and ensuring that they are compatible with national development objectives. Notwithstanding the progress made in subnational planning, coordination between national, subnational and sectoral planning processes remains suboptimal and alignment across the various planning domains is relatively weak. The Commission attributes these weaknesses to a lack of political will and limited capacity, as well as limited financial resources.

4.2.4 Accountability and inclusion

Accountability serves to promote ownership of the development planning process by public servants, while inclusion enables buy-in, responsiveness and ownership by citizens. The ***Imihigo*** system in Rwanda and the electronic budgeting and planning (e-Musrenbang) system in Indonesia provide useful benchmarks for strengthening inclusion and accountability in the planning system. In Rwanda, ***Imihigos***, or performance contracts, have been cited for their effectiveness in strengthening accountability. The *Imihigo* system plays a significant role in the country's planning process by setting performance indicators and targets, holding leaders accountable for delivering results, providing incentives and rewards for high-performing individuals and institutions, regularly communicating progress and performance, and nurturing a results-oriented culture.

In Indonesia, the e-Musrenbang system facilitates a consultative planning process for programme and budget planning. The Musrenbang is a deliberative multi-stakeholder forum that identifies and selects community development priorities. It represents a process for negotiating, reconciling and harmonizing differences between government and non-governmental organization stakeholders and reaching mutual consensus on development priorities and budgets. All government officials, together with local citizens, gather at a Musrenbang in January every year, at the village or community level, to discuss the next year's proposal for development programmes and budgets to be included in the government workplan.

In the Republic of Korea, the Economic Planning Board's practice of holding policy dialogues and convening "industry committees" and monthly meetings with key stakeholders to facilitate buy-in and shared goals constitutes a strategy of institutionalizing consultations in support of the implementation of the national development plan. This is unlike situations in which consultations are largely confined to the plan design stage.

Rwanda has been intentional in implementing policies that encourage gender equality, including gender budgeting and schemes to improve financial access and education and promote gender participation in public decision-making processes. This has served to harness otherwise untapped potential and accelerate poverty reduction (Redifer and others, 2020).

In Canada, development planning has achieved notable success across several domains, exemplified by a resilient economy, a globally respected healthcare system and a societal culture that embraces diversity. These accomplishments are firmly rooted in the nation's forward-looking economic strategies, a deep-seated commitment to social welfare and an unwavering dedication to fostering an inclusive society. However, despite these successes, challenges in areas such as Indigenous rights and environmental policy highlight the need for the continuous evaluation and adaptation of policies.

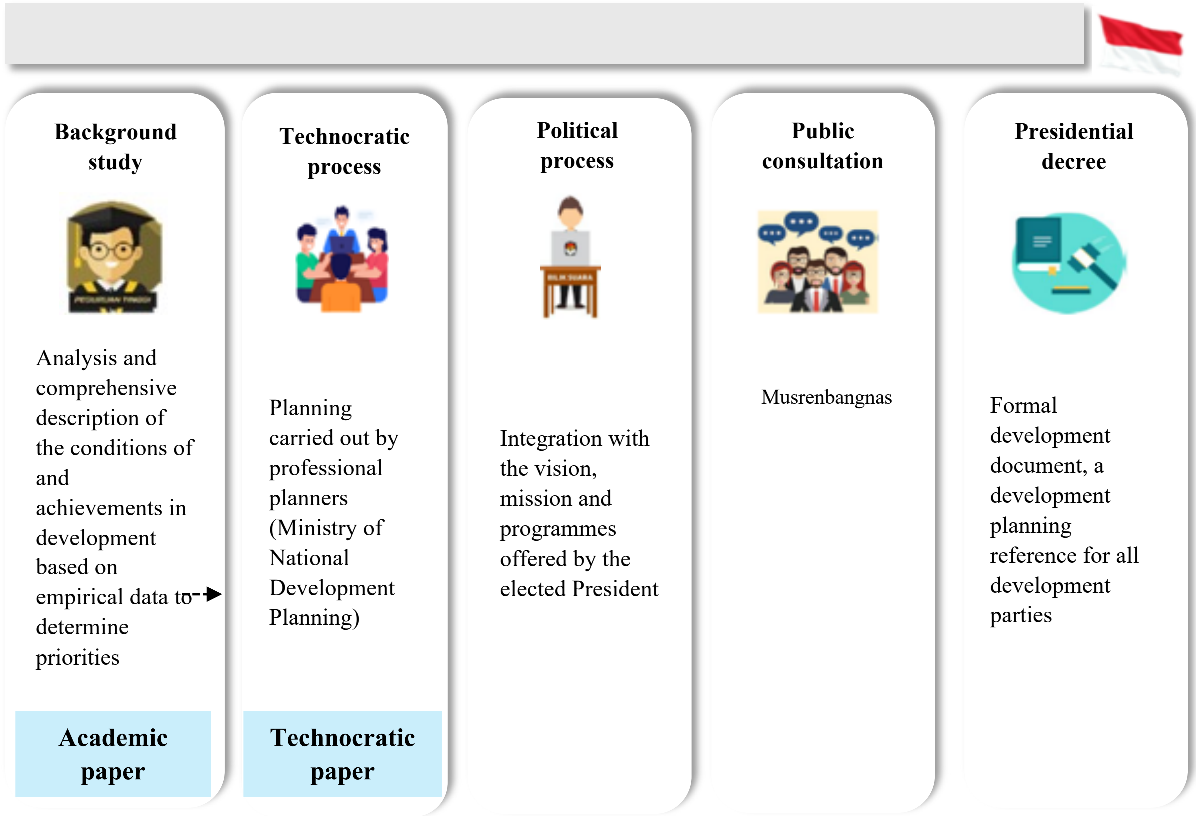
4.2.5 Continuity in plan implementation

A significant challenge in the planning process is a lack of commitment to plans and discontinuities in plan implementation. Such discontinuities often occur due to changes in the political environment and lead to a derailment of plan implementation. In Indonesia, the response to this challenge is to require presidential and vice-presidential candidates to align their vision, mission and priority programmes (political manifestos) with the medium-term development plan. After the President is elected, the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) drafts the preliminary medium-term development plan, which is the integrated document based, among other things, on the long-term development plan, the national vision and priority programmes offered by the newly elected President. The preliminary document is presented to the President by the Minister of National Development Planning for cabinet review and approval, followed by public consultation (see figure V below). Implementation of the medium-term development plan by all development parties is enforced by a presidential decree.

4.2.6 Alignment of financial and planning frameworks

The task of aligning financing frameworks to national development priorities remains a challenge for countries, due largely to weak coordination between the ministry of finance and the entity responsible for development. Merging both entities does not guarantee alignment, since ministries of finance tend to be preoccupied with the short-term fiscal imperatives of managing macroeconomic indicators without considering long-term socioeconomic and political trends and strategic public investment that a planning ministry provides. An independent planning ministry backed by the executive office may enhance the chances that the longer-term development issues are prioritized in the budget.

Figure V: Medium-term development planning process of Indonesia



Source: *Constructed using information from the Ministry of National Development Planning of Indonesia.*

In this context, the merger of budget and planning functions in Brazil and Nigeria is noteworthy. Nigeria has evolved a non-conventional development planning architecture that combines planning functions with budget preparation. The Federal Ministry of Finance is distinct from the Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning. However, the budget functions of the Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning are restricted to the preparation of the annual budget and the medium-term expenditure framework, while the financing of the budget is the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Finance. Providing the Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning with the responsibility of budget preparation creates an opportunity to strengthen the links between planned priorities and the financial framework. An assessment of the extent to which this institutional framework has worked will require a more detailed analysis of the synergies between the national development plan and the annual budget and medium-term expenditure framework.

Indonesia previously experienced challenges related to linking the national development plan with budgets; however, the case study suggests that the use of digital technology in the country's budgeting process is forging an inclusive budget process and strengthening linkages between budgetary allocations and the needs and aspirations of local communities. The e-Musrenbang system provides a digital platform for citizen input to the programme and budget allocation process. This ensures a more inclusive budgeting process and helps to align budgetary allocations with the needs and aspirations of the citizenry. The experiences of Indonesia and Nigeria in financial alignment may provide useful insights for other African countries.

4.2.7 Flexible and adaptive planning

The five-year economic and "social" development plans of the Republic of Korea clearly show how effectively the Government of that country implemented policies by constantly adjusting to a fluid foreign and domestic environment, coordinating resource allocation and promoting the participation of all stakeholders with strong political leadership. Flexibility is further evidenced by a gradual shift from Government-led to private sector-led planning, and from target-oriented planning to a more indicative and perspective-oriented planning approach. The planning process has also transitioned from a top-down strategy to a bottom-up approach due to the Government's newfound appreciation for the private sector's efforts and inventiveness, which proved crucial for successful implementation. Furthermore, the scope of the country's development planning model was broadened from solely focusing on economic development to including socioeconomic advancement starting from the fourth five-year economic and development plan. The experience of the Republic of Korea in setting a clear development vision yet being flexible in adapting its plans to achieve its goals may be instructive for African countries.

5. Policy directions for the African development planning system

Against the backdrop of the identified shortfalls and complexities of African countries' planning frameworks, the present section draws on the country case studies to address the key challenges facing the development planning ecosystem in Africa. As enumerated in section 2, challenges include fragmented planning ecosystems and an inhospitable planning design and implementation environment. The expectation is that adapting the recommendations set out below, as suited to country-specific needs, will improve the development planning processes and outcomes in African countries.

5.1 Promoting ownership and buy-in

5.1.1 Strengthen community engagement in plan design, implementation and monitoring

Development plans should be rooted in the realities of local communities. Encouraging community participation in all aspects of the planning process ensures that initiatives are relevant and have a higher chance of success. Active community involvement in the implementation of development plans can be enhanced through awareness-creation and involvement in not only the design phase but also the implementation and performance-tracking phases of plan execution. The e-Musrenbang initiative of Indonesia can serve as a useful reference in this regard. The e-Musrenbang process enables government officials at various levels, from the village to the provincial level, to input information regarding their proposed community programmes and budgets on a dedicated website. Once these programmes and budgets are approved by both legislative and executive entities, including the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas), officials can then access the final results of the funding allocations online.

5.1.2 Strengthen engagement with the private sector

The private sector has a pivotal role to play in the implementation of development plans. Structured engagement with the private sector on specific issues requiring its support can mitigate uncertainties, address misperceptions and elicit prompt policy reactions. Instructive in this regard is the experience of the Republic of Korea in institutionalizing inclusive consultation mechanisms, such as the "forums for policy dialogues" and "industry committees", to facilitate the sharing of a common vision and goals, overcome obstacles and foster a stronger connection between the plan and its execution. The country's monthly export promotion meetings were convened specifically to advocate for private sector support for the implementation of export-oriented policies. African Member States could adopt similar measures to foster public-private partnerships in support of their development priorities.

5.2 Towards integrated planning: breaking the silos

5.2.1 Nurture strong leadership and planning institutions

Analysis of country experiences suggests that strong political leadership, supported by effective institutions and an efficient bureaucracy, are key to breaking institutional silos and ensuring effective implementation. In the cases studied, political leadership was bolstered by centralizing information and authority in the central planning entity to carry out the development plan. The leadership in these countries demonstrated a clear vision and a strong commitment to economic development and social progress. African countries can benefit from fostering strong leadership that can guide development planning efforts effectively. A critical element of a strong planning system is that it must have clear roles and responsibilities, cabinet-level representation of its leadership and a strong voice in decisions relating to resource allocation.

5.2.2 Strengthen communication and information flows among planning entities

Ensuring that different sectors are not operating in isolation requires a holistic approach to policy formulation and implementation that takes into consideration the interdependencies between different sectors. To this end, enhancing communication and cooperation between national, provincial and local governments is vital. Regular forums and joint planning sessions can facilitate a more integrated approach to development, ensuring that policies are harmoniously executed at all levels. This includes developing integrated digital platforms for planning, reporting and alignment with financing frameworks and international commitments.

5.2.3 Digitizing planning frameworks

Deploying digital technology in the planning process can enhance transparency, as has been demonstrated by the e-Musrenbang initiative in Indonesia. Ghana has also used the ECA integrated planning and reporting tool to strengthen reporting and the alignment of national and sectoral planning frameworks with the budget and international commitments. The tool can also be used for sectoral, provincial and local development plans.

5.3 Clarifying roles and responsibilities

5.3.1 Strengthen legal and regulatory frameworks

Clear and enforceable legislative and regulatory frameworks are fundamental for guiding development planning and ensuring that all stakeholders adhere to policies and standards. Such frameworks also involve defining the roles and responsibilities of different entities involved in the development process. In this context, clarifying the roles of the planning agency and/or locating the central planning entity in one body will minimize the ambiguity of roles and responsibilities.

5.3.2 Strengthen systems of accountability

The Rwandan performance contract initiative (***Imihigo***) has been effective in promoting accountability and nurturing a results-oriented culture. The ***Imihigo*** system plays a significant role in the country's planning process by setting specific targets and indicators that government institutions and their leaders are expected to achieve within a given period, holding leaders accountable for delivering results, providing incentives and rewards for high-performing individuals and institutions, regularly communicating progress and the performance of leaders and institutions to the public, and nurturing a results-oriented culture.

5.3.3 Aligning budgets and medium-term expenditure frameworks with national priorities

Efficient financial management and the transparent allocation of resources are crucial for the successful implementation of development plans. Aligning budgets with national and subnational planning frameworks and instituting mechanisms to ensure accountability in the utilization of funds are key to resource optimization. A practical example in that regard can be seen in the e-Musrenbang system in Indonesia. The extent to which the e-Musrenbang system can be adapted to the African context is worth exploring. The ECA integrated planning and reporting tool also provides a digital platform for transparently mapping annual budgets to the targets of the medium-term plan, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063.

5.3.4 A flexible and agile development planning system

Development planning frameworks must be agile and flexible enough to adequately respond to the risks posed by political, economic, environmental and health-related shocks. This requires strong institutions with capacities to incorporate planning tools such as scenario-building and foresight analysis in their planning activities, which will ensure that plans are risk-informed. Such institutions must have mandates to make rapid decisions in response to unforeseen events. The Republic of Korea achieved flexibility in planning by developing "revised plans" in response to changing circumstances. This requires the capacity to both revise and implement the revised plans at short notice. Such flexibility enhanced the responsiveness of the country's development planning system to emerging challenges and opportunities.

5.3.5 International best practices and partnerships

Learning from the experiences of other countries and collaborating with international organizations can provide valuable insights and resources. Such partnerships can enhance the quality of development planning and open new opportunities for innovation and growth.

5.4 Cross-cutting issues

5.4.1 Capacity-building

Strengthening the capacity of institutions involved in development planning is essential. This includes not just training personnel but also improving administrative processes and adopting best practices in project management and policy implementation.

5.4.2 Data-driven and evidence-based decision-making

Policies grounded in empirical data are more likely to yield positive results. Investing in data collection, analysis and dissemination will enable policymakers to make informed decisions and tailor strategies to the specific needs of different regions and sectors. Countries will need a strong statistical institution that can further enhance data-driven planning to ensure realistic, achievable and impactful development strategies. In addition, seamless links between plan monitoring and the statistical system are required.

6. Conclusion

The present paper has drawn from the case experiences of nine countries to provide policy directions on how to achieve development planning systems that are more integrated, efficient and responsive to the needs of their people. The successful implementation of these strategies requires commitment, collaboration and a willingness to adapt and learn continually. Notably, the above lessons will work only if they are adapted to country-specific socioeconomic and political contexts. Notwithstanding, a review of country-specific conditions, with focused improvements in planning integration, stakeholder engagement and capacity-building, coupled with lessons from global best practices, will enable countries to further refine their approach to meet development goals effectively.

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