

Rethinking Africa's Social Development Agenda: Bridging the Gap Between Research and Policy Actions

Date: 5-6 December 2024

Venue: UNCC

Location: Addis Ababa

I. Introduction and overview

- Africa is a continent marked by stark contrasts. While it is home to some of the world's billionaires, over 50 percent of the global poor also reside there. The wealth of the seven richest Africans surpasses that of the poorest half of the continent's population. Despite having enough arable land to potentially feed the entire global population, more than half of Africa's population struggles with food insecurity. Exacerbating the situation is the severe level of poverty, which is so deep-rooted that without sustained effort to ensure inclusivity, many Africans will continue to hover just above the poverty line during prosperous times, only to fall back into poverty when negative shock hit.
- Beyond the circumstantial factors (exposure to shocks), several structural factors explain the persistence of poverty over the last decades – low poverty-reduction effect of economic growth, tight fiscal space, global financial and trade barriers, food insecurity, as well as conflicts and insecurity.¹ Recent estimates suggest that about 84.3 per cent of the multidimensionally poor live in Africa (556 million)². Additionally, Africa's structural transformation has not been accompanied by productivity gains in agriculture and other sectors. Rather, it has primarily been the result of reduced share of labour in agricultural sector and increased demand for goods and services produced in the modern sectors of the economy.³
- The mega-trends present both challenges and opportunities for Africa. On the demographic front, Africa will have the youngest population by 2050 as the rest of the world ages. This means Africa will have the labour force, but this requires building their capacities as well as providing job opportunities, essential for addressing unemployment and reducing poverty. While Africa didn't contribute to climate change, it is most affected by it. Here, thanks to green minerals, it can help the rest of world find solutions to fight climate change. Given the fast pace of urbanization, African cities need to be better planned to harness the benefits from urbanization as six in 10 people will live in urban areas by 2050. Lastly, technological revolution can be used to improve the efficiency of government services.

II. Purpose

- To address Africa's social development issues effectively, there is a growing need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach that brings together experts and policy makers to define key interventions for the continent's social development agenda.

¹ <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/49400/b12023747.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

² UN-Habitat (2022), World Cities Report 2022 United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Nairobi, https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/06/wcr_2022.pdf

³ Diao, X., M. McMillan, D. Rodrik (2017). "[The Recent Growth Boom in Developing Economies: A Structural Change Perspective.](#)" *NBER Working Paper* No. 23132, and Diao, X., K. Harttgen, M. McMillan (2017). "[The Changing Structure of Africa's Economies.](#)" *The World Bank Economic Review*, vol. 31(2), pp. 412-433.

- As the world prepares for the World Social Summit (WSS) in November 2025, it is crucial for African member States to articulate their unique challenges and opportunities in social development. This event aims to foster dialogue on pressing social issues, share best practices and develop actionable research that align with global goals while addressing local challenges (?).
- The event will serve as a platform for thought leaders and experts to engage in focussed discussions, share knowledge, and offer set of actionable strategies.

III. Objectives

- The main objective of the EGM is to consolidate experts' input in the formulation of Africa's social development agenda. The meeting will aim to identify key priorities, analyse gaps in current policies, and develop evidence-based recommendations for improving social outcomes across the continent.

IV. Key themes

- The meeting will be structured around the following key thematic areas to ensure comprehensive coverage of Africa's social development challenges and opportunities. These areas include:
 - a. Macroeconomic frameworks and debt issues.
 - b. Education and skills development.
 - c. Gender equality and social inclusion.
 - d. Youth empowerment and employment; and
 - e. Climate change and social resilience.

V. Expected outcomes.

- a. Knowledge product: Drafting an African position paper framework.
- b. Long-term Research agenda and Policy Partnerships Framework: Establish or strengthen frameworks that enable ongoing collaboration between research institutes and policy makers facilitated by ECA; and
- c. Capacity building: Empowering policy makers with new tools and frameworks to integrate research into their policy actions.

VI. Participants

- a. The participants at this conference include subject matter experts, member states, and s=UN staff members as well as staff members of the AU commission.