

How Africa can achieve Agenda 2063

Dr Emmanuel Owusu-Sekyere, chief research specialist at the HSRC's Africa Institute of South Africa, advises leaders to look to their own countries to achieve the continent-wide goals of the African Union's Agenda 2063.

As Africa rises, and begins to forge a more positive outlook of its future, the continent's scholars, businesspeople, community leaders and policy-makers have called for a reformulation of its future – big ideas for the 21st century.

In 2013 the members of the African Union (AU) launched Agenda 2063, a vision and action plan for the Africa we want to see in the centenary year of the Organisation of African Unity. The OAU, the precursor to the AU, was established in 1963.

Agenda 2063 is Pan-African and people-centred. It incorporates lessons and experiences from the past to drive Africa's development and transformation for the next 50 years. Its ultimate goal is to secure unity, prosper-

ity and peace for all citizens of Africa.

But some ask whether Africa can realise its Agenda 2063 objectives if it does not address key challenges facing the continent right now.

Economic transformation

Dr Emmanuel Owusu-Sekyere, chief research specialist at the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA), believes that for Africa to reach its goals, the continent must take united, practical steps to change the status quo in integration, development and leadership. AISA is a programme of the Human Science Research Council (HSRC).

"Action, hard work and genuineness are needed from all Africans. Laws must be changed to address specific challenges," Owusu-Sekyere says.

"Governments must take the lead to ensure that economic transformation takes place with speed."

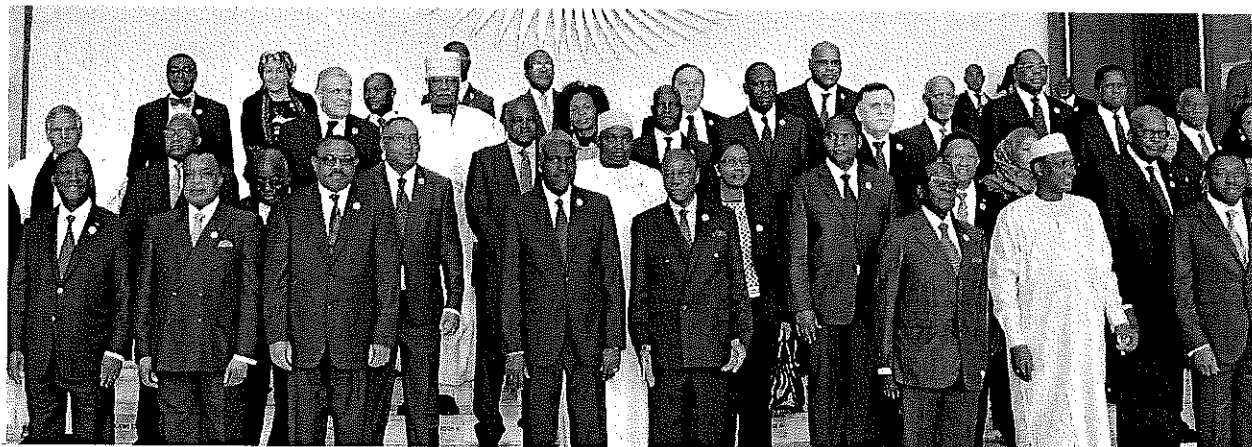
Africans must take a "hands-on-deck approach" to overcome poverty, high unemployment and poor development, Owusu-Sekyere says. Africa is not creating jobs because economies produce and export primary commodities, value that leaves its shores after a too-short production phase.

"The few countries that are endowed with natural resources export the raw mineral resources," he says.

"The growth we are generating is jobless growth. We say Africa is rising – due to international commodity markets – but it is not the in-house or self-made production capacity of the continent."

Africa must unite

The continent must therefore go beyond the political commitments and capitalise intra-African trade.



Trade integration has long been a strategic objective for Africa. But despite some regional communities' success in eliminating tariffs, the African market remains fragmented. Poor infrastructure, copious paperwork, burdensome regulation, corruption and poor access to trade financing are just a few of the impediments that inhibit the movement of goods, services, people and capital across borders.

"The emphasis should be on trading with each other to make the continent self-sufficient," Owusu-Sekyere says. "But the reality is we are still more interested in trading with China, America and the EU." He says a dollar is still a dollar, whether it comes from the US or Africa.

Helping business thrive

Governments, he says, must lead in reducing the cost of trade by eliminating red tape in cross-border transactions, reducing corruption and digitising currently manual processes.

If trade integration is done right, Africa's small businesses should thrive. Increased competitiveness and economies of scale could weed out corporates that are less productive in the African marketplace.

Trade integration could also establish and strengthen product value chains, and speed up the transfer of technology and knowledge via spill-over effects. It could also incentivise infrastructure development, and attract more foreign direct investment.

According to Owusu-Sekyere, the new Free Trade area that African leaders are pushing for this year would be a step in the right direction. It would consolidate the movement of goods and people across Africa and force the continent to evaluate value chains like those in the EU and Asia, regions where intra-trade pacts mean growth for all.

Owusu-Sekyere says the SADC region, for example, could develop its manufacturing chain by drawing synergies from the industrial capacity and raw materials of each member state.

This would stop countries from exporting primary goods, stop them from having to buy finished products they could have manufactured themselves. It

would increase the industrial base and create many more jobs, especially for the youth.

The youth dividend

About 200 million Africans are aged between 15 and 24, making it the continent with the world's largest youth population. But most of these young people are unemployed. This, Owusu-Sekyere says, is a ticking time bomb that must be defused.

"If our youth had work we would have a huge consumer market which would, in turn, generate economic growth. But in the absence of jobs the youth dividend will end up being an explosive source of instability on the continent." Urgent intervention is needed.

"We need to transform our economies into job-creating economies to benefit the youth."

National planning

A key strategy in achieving Agenda 2063 would be to break it down – and other global development plans such as the Sustainable Development Goals – into workable national development plans that could be implemented on the ground, to change the socioeconomic conditions of the ordinary person on the African street.

These plans, Owusu-Sekyere advises, should have shorter implementation periods, such as three to five years, which would make them easier to monitor.

"They need to be done in such a way that whoever comes into office must know that they are not party development goals but rather national development goals, which must continue," he says.

Owusu-Sekyere explains that over the years, changes in governments has meant a constant change of plans, a waste of resources already spent. There also is a need for governments and the intelligentsia to coordinate a skills revolution in the continent.

"We need forward-thinking presidents," he says. "We need to stop playing lip service to the challenges of our people, which have been known for decades, and start actually taking action. We need leaders with strong political will who have the needs of the people at heart." ●

This article was originally published on SAnews.gov.za.