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Social policies and Continental Commitments to reducing poverty and inequality in Africa

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November 2020

Question

What are Africa's social policies/ continental commitments towards reducing poverty and inequality?

What progress has the continent made towards SDG targets

How effective are regional bodies with the remit to promote progress on regional issues ?

Contents

1. Summary

Continental commitments made to address poverty and inequality across Africa sometimes a decade earlier, now exist in an arena where the focus of development is firmly on the Sustainable Development Goals. These are a holistic agenda for development of all countries and already contain the principle of "leave no one behind". Nation States have made commitments to work towards Sustainable Development Goals and targets; reporting against these comes from national level data.

International development architecture that supports national governments is dominated by UN agencies and driven in particular by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA) whose strength derives from its role as the only UN agency mandated to operate at the regional and subregional levels, to harness resources and bring them to bear on Africa's priorities.

African institutions derive legitimacy from the African Union (of all 55 member states) and drive Africa's growth and economic development. Eight sub regional bodies are the building blocks of the African Economic Community (established in 1991) which provides the overarching framework for continental economic integration. These are often the regional units through which policy and programmes are implemented.

Regional commitments to social policy are guided by the **AU Social Policy Framework for Africa** (2008); biennial reporting on progress to the AU is expected. A substantial part of publications on the impact of regional organisations is directed at collaboration, peace keeping and resolution of conflicts. Very little published material covering regional efforts to promote social development, gender equity or other human development social policy interventions was identified. This may be unsurprising since the focus of effort is at national not regional level, hence reporting within African mechanisms is delivered via country assessments within the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) reviews which occur at country level.

Serious challenges exist and most countries are currently performing very poorly against SDG targets (Africa SDG Index and Dashboards Report, 2020). Additional reporting on progress in addressing poverty and inequality drawn from the UN Economic Commission for Africa review of progress on the Programme of Action for the Least Developed countries (2011-2020) shows that although many of the more ambitious aspects of the Programme of Action are not being met, human development in Africa's LDCs is nevertheless increasing. There are however serious risks of stagnation or reversal of positive gains due to the COVID-19 crisis with some programme efforts delayed – for example the effective start of free trade, a priority for the South African presidency of the AU. Making effective the African Free Trade Zone (AfCFTA) is now postponed to 2021 with current AU activities focusing on the fight against COVID-19.

To some extent there is a 'missing middle' between global/continental targets framed by UN or AU goals and country level national development policy and plans which address those same targets. The predominance of reporting against UN goals and programmes over AU initiatives and frameworks illustrates this. Although in theory several policy positions are crafted at subregional level and then advocated for by subregional blocks, and in a reverse process agreements at AU level will often be analysed at sub-regional level before being domesticated

this report has not been able to identify reporting that tracks implementation against regional plans or considers efficacy of this process.

2. Continental commitments towards reducing poverty and inequality in Africa

International Development Architecture

The **UN Sustainable Development Goals** provide an international framework to address global challenges including those of poverty and inequality. These 17 goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda were adopted in 2015 by world leaders. They apply universally to all and require countries to mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind (UN, 2015).

A raft of **UN Conventions** further protects the rights of specific population groups[1], often but not always disproportionately represented amongst the poorer sections of a community. These are binding upon those Nation States who have signed and ratified each convention; not all are universally adopted. Provisions pass into national and international law with State parties required to report on implementation and monitoring at regular intervals. Examples relevant to social policy include the UN Refugee Convention (1951); UN Convention on Rights of the Child (1989); UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and others.

UN agencies work with national governments to support efforts (technically and financially) to deliver on relevant policy areas and to deliver against SDGs, the UN **Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries,** the greatest number of which are found in Africa compared to other regions of the world (UNECA, 2020) and Africa's own Agenda 2063 (see below).

UN Economic Commission for Africa[2] promotes the economic and social development of its member States, fosters intra-regional integration, and promotes international cooperation for Africa's development. Made up of 54 member States, ECA's strength derives from its role as the only UN agency mandated to operate at the regional and subregional levels to harness resources and bring them to bear on Africa's priorities. It also plays a dual role as a regional arm of the UN and as a key component of the African institutional landscape. Among seven thematic areas of focus Gender, Poverty and Social Policy is one (UNECA, 2020).

The **UN Commission for Social Development** (CSocD) under the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs has been the key United Nations body in charge of the follow up and implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action on Social Development (1995). Its purpose was to advise on social policies of a general nature and, in particular on all matters in the social field not covered by specialised inter-governmental agencies. (UN-DESA, 2020)

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[1] Such as older persons, disabled persons, minority groups
[2] Established in 1958

To provide support for Africa's development the **UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa** (OSAA) was established in 2003 and subsequently expanded in 2012 to hold, responsibility to:

- coordinate the Interdepartmental Task Force on African Affairs (IDTFA), to ensure a coherent and integrated approach for United Nations support for Africa, including following up on the implementation of all global summit and conference outcomes related to Africa;
- act as the focal point for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) within the United Nations Secretariat at Headquarters
- coordinate and guide the preparation of Africa-related reports and inputs, in particular support for NEPAD by the United Nations System and the international community, including the private sector and civil society;
- establish and operate a monitoring mechanism to review commitments made towards Africa's development.

African Institutional Architecture for Development

The **Organization for African Unity** (OAU) was created by leaders of 32 newly independent African states in 1963 to safeguard the interests and independence of all African states, encourage the continent's development, and settle disputes among member states. It was succeeded in 2002 by the **African Union** to refocus attention from decolonisation and dismantling apartheid towards increased cooperation and integration of the 55 member states to drive Africa's growth and economic development.

The African Union Development Agency – **New Partnership for Africa's Development** (AUDA-NEPAD) facilitates and coordinates the development of continent-wide programmes and projects, mobilises resources and engages the global community with NEPAD which is a socio-economic flagship Programme of the African Union (adopted 2001). NEPAD's four primary objectives are to eradicate poverty, promote sustainable growth and development, integrate Africa in the world economy and accelerate the empowerment of women. (AUDA-NEPAD, 2020)

The strategic direction of the NEPAD Agency is divided into six themes:
- Agriculture and Food Security
- Climate Change and Natural Resource Management
- Regional Integration and Infrastructure
- Human Development
- Economic and Corporate Governance
- Cross-Cutting Issues – Gender, ICT, Capacity Development and Communications

NEPAD is endorsed by the UN as the framework for the provision of international support to Africa's development. NEPAD is thus a vision and framework that facilitates and coordinates the development of continent-wide programmes and projects, mobilizes resources and engages the global community, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and AU Member States in the implementation of these programmes and projects. It does not make regional policies/commitments per se.

The **African Peer Review Mechanism** was established in 2003 by the African Union in the framework of the implementation of the NEPAD, as an instrument through which AU Member States voluntarily self-monitor their governance and performance. The objectives of the APRM are primarily to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated subregional and continental economic integration through experience sharing and reinforcement of successful and best practices, including identifying deficiencies and assessment of requirements for capacity building. Conscious of Africa's development challenges and the role regional economic communities have to play in development efforts across the continent, the **African Development Bank (AfDB) Group** works very closely with the continent's regional economic communities, especially in the area of **capacity building**.

Africa's **Regional Economic Communities** (RECs) include eight sub regional bodies which are the building blocks of the African Economic Community (established in 1991) which provides the overarching framework for continental economic integration. They are often the regional units through which policy and programmes are implemented as noted above. These are the:

- Arab Maghreb Union (AMU/UMA) in the north,
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the west,
- East African Community (EAC) in the east,
- Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) also in the east,
- Southern African Development Community (SADC) in the south,
- Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) in the southeast,
- Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in the centre, and
- Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD) in the north.

European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) provides an interactive map of country membership by organisation and thematic area (economic, geographic, energy, peace, environment etc) since some nations are members of more than one REC. This can be found at https://indd.adobe.com/view/f49ac87d-7aa3-4cf7-822e-841d674bbc92

Other Continental Commissions with Social Policy remit

African Union **Department for Social Affairs** (DSA) works to promote the AU's health, labour, employment, migration, social development, drug control, crime prevention, sport and cultural agenda. It also deals with health issues that reach beyond country borders (such as malaria, HIV, Ebola and other infectious diseases including Covid-19).

The African **Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights** (Banjul) established 1987 along with the African **Court of Human and Peoples' Rights** were established in 2004 to complement the protective mandate of the African Commission.

Under this African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights is a **Working Group on Rights of Older Persons and People with Disabilities**, established 2007, with responsibilities to draft a Concept Paper for consideration by the African Commission that will serve as a basis for the

adoption of the Draft Protocol on Ageing and People with Disabilities. This protocol sets out responsibilities of States Parties that shall take appropriate and effective measures, including policy, legislative, administrative, institutional and budgetary steps, to ensure, respect, promote, protect and fulfil the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, without discrimination on the basis of disability, and collect data on older persons and people with disabilities *to ensure proper mainstreaming of their rights in the policies and development programmes* of Member States.

Regional social policies

The first **AU Social Policy Framework for Africa** was presented in 2008 and this encourages member states to adopt minimum social protection policies covering: essential health care, social insurance, social welfare, employment guarantee and non-contributory cash transfer schemes for children, informal workers, the unemployed, elder persons and persons with disabilities. Member States are expected to formulate and implement their minimum social protection policies along the above dimensions. In this framework it was expected that the AU Commission would establish an inter-departmental mechanism for the coordination and promotion of the SPF and receive biennial reports from AU Member States (Social Policy Framework for Africa, 2008:44). Through reviewing reports, assessing the status of implementation of the key recommendations of the SPF, considering factors and issues contributing to, or affecting, the implementation process it was expected that the AU produce a report on social development in Africa every two years, highlighting emerging issues and continuing challenges. No such report was identified.

On the occasion of the 50 year anniversary of the OAU/AU the Golden Jubilee Summit of the Union (2013) directed the African Union Commission (AUC), to prepare a continental 50-year agenda through a people-driven process outlining the Africa We Want, namely **Agenda 2063**. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) supported this process. The first ten-year implementation plan (2013-2023) is under way, and not yet reported upon.

3. Overall Progress Towards Sustainable Development Goals

Annually the Africa SDG Index and Dashboards Report is undertaken jointly by the Sustainable Development Goals Centre for Africa (SDGC/A) and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) to understand the performance of African states on all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The third index (July 2020) assessed progress towards SDG goals with the additional lens of "leave no one behind" and includes preliminary analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs in Africa. Serious challenges exist and most countries are currently performing very poorly. Across all countries and goals, the most frequently observed trends are stagnation and moderate improvement, which is a positive development as compared to the 2019 analysis that was overwhelmingly stagnant (Africa SDG Index and Dashboards Report, 2020). Main findings are:
- The only goal for which the majority of African countries are on track is SDG 13 on Climate Action.

- No country scored green for 13 of the 17 goals (a situation unchanged from 2019).
- The goals facing the greatest challenges are SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing), SDG 9 (infrastructure), and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).
- The goals where the continent is performing better are SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production).
- The Leave No One Behind (LNOB) results show that all African countries are currently struggling to tackle all kinds of inequalities.
- The context of the global COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated a humanitarian and economic crisis, that poses risks for SDGs and compromises the efforts on the UN Decade of Action that was to accelerate efforts to deliver on the goals by 2030. Although it is still too early to understand the conclusive impact of COVID-19 the previous Africa SDG Index (2019) confirmed that the continent was overall off-track towards meeting SDGs, so this can only be bad news.
- All 34 country experts who validated results reported that lack of funding and resources is one of the most important challenges both in terms of SDG implementation and monitoring.

Additional reporting on progress in addressing poverty and inequality can be drawn from the UN Economic Commission for Africa review of progress on the Programme of Action for the Least Developed countries (2011-2020). The LDCs were established by the United Nations as a category in 1971 and of 47 LDCs, 33 are in Africa. The first programme of action began in 1981. The current Programme of Action is the fourth such 10-year programme in the United Nations system and outlines eight priority areas for the LDCs and development partners one of which is human and social development

Although many of the more ambitious aspects of the Programme of Action are not being met, human development in Africa's LDCs is nevertheless increasing. The United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index is used as the measure of this since it accounts for multiple aspects of development, not just the economic aspect (UN ECA, 2020:12). Average Human Development Index in LDCs for the five subregions of Africa is shown to be steadily increasing over the period of the Programme of Action. The Southern African LDCs have, on average, a higher Human Development Index score than other subregions. Those LDCs in Central and West Africa are considerably lower. South Sudan is the only country in which the Human Development Index has decreased over the course of the Programme of Action. (UN ECA, 2020:13)

In conclusion this report flags that although a Programme of Action may remain relevant due to its specific focus on the LDCs, a new iteration would now exist in an arena where the focus of development is firmly on the Sustainable Development Goals. These are a holistic agenda for development of all countries and already contain the principle of "leave no one behind". This is a clear call to all development partners that countries facing the most significant barriers to development, the LDCs, must be assisted as much as possible to achieve sustainable development. Future commitments to any further programme of action for the LDCs in the next decade, must consider the extensive coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals and take care not to reiterate calls to action, commitments and aspirations that already exist. The international community must also appropriately consider Agenda 2063. With the majority of the LDCs being African, and this proportion set to grow over the next decade, the addition of a third

international plan of action where two high-profile international development agendas already exist would need to be carefully justified (UN ECA, 2020:32).

4. How effective are regional bodies with the remit to promote progress

To some extent there is a 'missing middle' between global/continental targets framed by UN or AU goals and country level national development policy and plans which address those same targets. The predominance of reporting against UN goals and programmes over AU initiatives and frameworks illustrates this. Although in theory several policy positions are crafted at subregional level and then advocated for by subregional blocks, and in a reverse process agreements at AU level may be analysed at sub-regional level before being domesticated, this report has not been able to identify reporting that considers implementation and efficacy of this process.

For example, South Africa assumed the rotating presidency of the AU during 2020 pledging to resolve protracted conflicts under the motto "Silencing the guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development" and work to unlock the continent's economic potential. Priorities of the South African presidency are economic integration of Africa and progress in making effective the African Free Trade Zone (AfCFTA), which legally entered into force on May 30th, 2019. However, due to the COVID-19-crisis, the effective start of free trade has been postponed to 2021 with current AU activities focusing on the fight against covid-19 (BMEIA, 2020).

The rest of this section focuses on migration, since this issue has a clear regional/transboundary element. It is possible to map responsibilities but harder to assess to what extent any achievement may have contributed to reducing inequality and poverty. The African Union Department of Social Affairs (DSA) plays a leadership role in ensuring the overall coherence of social development programmes and in promoting, monitoring and evaluating associated policies and strategies. It hosts for example the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) Secretariat and the Division of Labour, Employment and Migration. The division of labour and employment focuses on the rights, labour standards, integrated employment policies and social security systems. This remit is relevant to poverty and inequality as across Africa, unemployment and underemployment contribute to the high levels of poverty and compromise basic human rights and dignity of individuals and communities.

Recognising the challenges of migration issues in the continent, the African Union adopted the New AU Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018-2030) and the AUC/IOM/ILO/ECA Joint Programme on Labour Migration Governance for Development and Integration known as the (JLMP) to govern migration in the continent. Policies address international migration through focusing on several thematic areas with the aim of supporting member states to develop policies to maximize development-oriented benefits while minimizing negative impacts. This is supposed to ensure that labour migration policies are effective in addressing migrants needs, support the development of policies for Member States and enhance

regional integration (Migration Policy Framework for Africa, 2018). Information on effectiveness is not easily found.

This Joint Labour Migration Programme (JLMP) is one of the successful programmes implemented so far. The programme identifies migration data and statistics as key pillars for improving migration governance and integration in the continent which has a major impact in developing evidence-based policies and decision making for extended social economic benefits, protection and well-being of migrants in Africa (African Union, 2020). Some discrete reports provide an insight into AU efforts on migration.

A first edition of the Africa Migration Report produced by the African Union Commission in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) launched in October 2020 with support from the USA and Switzerland. This seeks to provide additional perspectives that ensure a more complete understanding of this complex phenomenon, thereby correcting misconceptions regarding African migration. It clarifies for example that the bulk of migration (almost 80%) in Africa is intra-continental, and underscores the need for African institutions to better understand and manage the migration phenomenon for the benefit of the continental aspirations articulated in Agenda 2063. (Africa Migration Report, 2020)

There is regular production of a Labour Migration Statistics Report in Africa every two years. The African Union Commission for Social Affairs in partnership with International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) launched a Second edition of the Labour migration Statistics report in Africa (September 2020).

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Suggested citation

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