GovernanceLink
an APRM Newsletter

Leveraging Innovation for a Progressive Africa

SPECIAL EDITION ON YOUTH

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As governments ease lockdown regulations that have been implemented since March 2020 to slow down the spread of Covid-19, we can’t help but look forward to life as we knew it before we were rudely interrupted by this faceless beast called the Corona Virus. A few activities that were banned have made a come-back, schools have opened, shopping is no longer as painful and rules around restaurants and places of worship have also been relaxed. Though we still need to adhere to some level of restrictions, like the imposition on social distancing and wearing of face masks, I’d much rather follow these rules than be locked up at home with my screaming kids and solemn husband.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to welcome readers to the 9th Issue of APRM Governance Link. The publication of this youth inspired edition coincides with the International Youth Day, 12 August 2020. The theme for this International Youth Day, “Youth Engagement for Global Action”, seeks to highlight the ways in which the engagement of young people at local, national and global levels is enriching national and multilateral institutions and processes, as well as draw lessons on how their representation and engagement in formal institutional politics can be significantly enhanced.

By putting our money where our mouth is, on this edition we have invited a special guest, a youth advocate and passionate activist and APRM Youth Coordinator, Mr. Lennon Monyae to borrow the reigns from the editor and tell us of the role young people are playing in the management of the pandemic and the recovery following its outbreak.
Since the 1st International Youth Symposium held in Ndjamena, the Republic of Chad in July 2019, the APRM Secretariat has achieved great strides in mainstreaming youth into APRM programmes. Credit must be given to APRM leadership that has maintained a listening ear to the clarion call by youth for their inclusion and participation in APRM processes.

Since the Youth Symposium, the APRM has achieved the following:

- The setting up and operationalisation of the continental APRM Youth Network;
- The signing of a Collaborative Framework between the APRM Secretariat and the African Union Commission Youth Division aimed at streamlining and ensuring youth-led accountability and advocacy in the APRM Member States;
- The APRM Targeted Review of Youth Unemployment by the Republic of Namibia;
- Inclusion of youth experts in APRM Country Review Missions;
- Development of a supplementary APRM Youth Questionnaire that is yet to be validated by APRM Member States;
- Collaborative projects with research institutions and NGOs on youth issues;

This edition of the APRM Governance Link newsletter is inspired by online youth engagements that focused on how Covid-19 has affected the lives of youth in different African countries. A common thread in all engagements is that the youth are cognizant of the fact that good governance is paramount in fighting the pandemic.

I would also like to appreciate the efforts of Ms. Mandipa Ndlovu, and Ms. Chioma Agwuegbu whom through the ‘Re-Launching Africa Series’ online engagements facilitated discussions on the topics such as food security, youth participation and contributions to development during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the spirit of promoting peer to peer engagement, readers are encouraged to interact with the APRM Secretariat and the authors of the opinion articles through the APRM Social Media Pages.

In conclusion, young people interested in the promotion of democracy and good governance should be reminded that the APRM is open for youth peer-learning, engagement and sharing of best practices that will lead to a better governed Africa. The APRM Secretariat is now accessible to ordinary young Africans more than ever. Youth from across all African regions are encouraged to engage the APRM and its Youth Network in the lead up to the 2nd APRM International Youth Symposium.

At a Member State level, young people are encouraged to contact their national Secretariats. 

Bonne lecture...
Politicising Inroads to Innovation

The Opportunity
At the intersection of preserving lives and livelihoods, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented an opportune moment for Africa to learn from past mistakes, confront glaring inequalities, as well as look progressively forward, in redirecting continental foci towards engaging policies and practices that affect tangible change on the ground. Now more than ever, innovation is needed to buttress and catalyse efforts in e-health, e-learning, agri-tech, and many other areas to upscale production and the continent’s development trajectory. Recognising this, the Re-Launching Africa Series, a research partnership between myself and TechHer NG, sought to engage in policy consultations with 21 African experts already doing the work on the ground. The experts hailed from 15 different African countries, and spoke on seven different thematic areas, in attempts to understand how best to catapult Africa onto the next phase of productivity in the aftermath of the current global health pandemic.

The preliminary findings of the report show that innovation cannot be separated from the need for solid commitment to infrastructure investment, social protections, as well as the inclusion of technocrats and entrepreneurs – many of whom are under the age of 35 – working to shape Africa’s developmental future, into policy spaces. Historical concerns regarding human capacity development trajectories and sustainable economic opportunities continue. COVID-19 has simply amplified these challenges. State commitments to progressive, transparent, and inclusive governance remain necessary, if Africa is to change its development trajectory in line with the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the objectives for the African Union (AU)’s Agenda 2063.

African technocrats and innovators whose mandates are founded on social protection, and sustainable economic opportunities,
must both be rallied together, and funded, to upscale the work they are currently doing. Whether it is engaging with organisations such as WomEng which is on a mission to train 1 million girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); Lüla which is revolutionising the way Africans commute within urban spaces; Girls’ Education South Sudan (GESS) which is making sure that young girls continue to receive education in the fragile state; or Shujaaz Inc. which engages 7.5 million East Africans under the age of 25 regarding their civic duties; there must be coordinated efforts at mainstreaming the voices of such organisations within continental policy spaces in a show of political will towards investing in, and compiling data for, the Africa we want.

The State of Affairs

Africa’s 1.3 billion inhabitants currently account for 17% of the total world population. In the next seven years, the continent’s working age population is set to account for 57.7% of the total population. Additionally, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) notes that in the next 30 years, “young Africans are forecast to form over a quarter of the world’s labour force.” Such data is a call for states, and continental governing bodies, to provide clarity in tangibly planning for the economic security of Africa’s largest demographic. To reiterate, non-tokenistic representation remains vital as Goal 18 of AU Agenda 2063 – which promotes targets to create socio-economic opportunities for Africa’s youth – as it cannot be achieved in the absence deliberately progressive political will from member states.

Understanding Precarity

Generationally sustained progression lies amplifying the agency of Africa’s youth demographic. The dissonance arising from young people resting both as Africa’s biggest resource, and most precarious demographic, is simply unsustainable. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, over 40% of young Africans considered their “living situation to be very bad or fairly bad”. Also, in 2018, only 19.1% (one fifth) of young sub-Saharan Africans received formalised working wages. Moreover, “only 26.4% [had] their own account at a financial institution”. This precarity remains concerning at best given the additional nuance of uncoordinated, small scale entrepreneurship, in most African countries. Where people are self-employed and informally vending in urban areas, fiscal safety nets suffer where transactions contribute little to the tax base. Additionally, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the limitations to movement to reduce contact, at the intersection of the need to safeguard livelihoods for this group, is a balancing act many governments are still struggling to deal with.

In a survey conducted by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation in June 2020, 143 young and mid-level career African citizens from 35 countries, cited economic instability (at 79%) and unemployment (at 66%) as the biggest challenges to young people in their countries. Addressing the three main social and economic impacts of COVID-19 in

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5 Ibid., p.35
Where scarcity – through unemployment, resources, and others – breeds conflict, key lobbying government stakeholders must leverage mandates through political economy analyses that forecast data providing the potential benefits for both governments and citizens. Nuancing the end goal for the African Union’s year of “silencing the guns” in African development; systemic representations of ‘guns’ through pervasive patron-client relations that cripple economies must not be used as ammunition to further subvert African citizens’ access to sustainable economic opportunities. Corruption runs parallel to disinvestment in infrastructure. Challenges to overcoming COVID-19 will persist where, only 20% of Africans have access to water inside the house. Where similar data regarding sewerage is concerned, only 30% have access. Additionally, one in five Africans “who tried to obtain utility services from government during the previous year report they had to pay a bribe”. Such disinvested, clientelist ways of governance are systemic and their prevalence must be overhauled through accountable adherences to transparency and the rule of law across jurisdictions which must be vehemently advocated for. Innovation will not solve the systemic barriers to Africa’s progression – that requires political will.

### Allowing Opportunities for Innovation

There is a role to be played by the AU, and various continental stakeholders, in coordinat-ing and upscaling localised efforts by young Africans who are tackling the continent’s biggest challenges. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, sharing of best practices both need to be revised, and shared beyond high-level continental fora, to inform coordinated progress. More importantly, representation of young people in policies, as well as monitoring and evaluation processes that concern them remains key. Here, the African Peer Review Mechanism’s (APRM) Youth Network must play a vital role in identifying key

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2. Ibid., p.1
4. Ibid.
representatives. Where exclusion is effected, apathy is the result. Africa cannot afford to cultivate a culture of apathy. Many African innovators and entrepreneurs who come up with solutions to infrastructural, and other continental challenges, continually face bureaucratic bottlenecks and lack funding to upscale projects. The politicisation of access, as an impediment to development, must be reviewed if Africa is to progress. With basic infrastructure such as electricity bearing positive correlations to digital literacy – a vital component of social integration especially with remote social conduct given the COVID-19 pandemic and funding priorities, as well as guidelines to what constitutes social protection must be revisited in each state. Innovation cannot intercede where disinvestment in all its forms persists.


Ms Mandipa Ndlovu

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The British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill was famously known for having coined the phrase: “Never waste a good crisis”. Africa having passed the 160th day mark since recording its first confirmed case of the novel coronavirus on the 14th of February 2020, is poised to take a moment of reflection on whether it has taken heed of the wartime’s presidents’ words. With 773,418 confirmed cases, 438,288 recoveries and 16,479 deaths (as on 22 July 2020), it is important for the continent to take stock on whether the governance system that exists have been sufficient to curb transmission and enable an environment to treat and medically manage patients. South Africa accounting for close to half of all confirmed COVID-19 cases, is perhaps a good case study on how to rethink governance system’s in times of a global pandemic.

The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund South Africa’s (UNICEF-SA) 2017/2018 Health Budget brief alluded to the many challenges and progress faced by the South Africa in relation to the provision of quality health care. UNICEF-SA’s budget brief when accessing trends in health spending of the country revealed that between the financial years of 2013/14 to 2019/20, South Africa’s consolidated spending and allocation of government expenditure ranged between 13.4% to 14.1%. It further reflected that South Africa’s health expenditure as a percentage of total government expendi-

2 https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/
3 UNICEF South Africa, Health Budget South Africa 2017/2018
ture ranked the fifth highest on the continent. This arguably demonstrates the country’s seriousness to the provision of quality health care for all. Although admirable, the figure remains below the target of 15% of governments annual budget spent, which was set out as the target by heads of state of African Union (AU) countries in April 2001 when adopting the Abuja Declarations⁴.

The Covid-19 pandemic opens an opportunity for African Union Member States to reprioritise their government annual budget to ensure the fulfilment of the Abuja Declaration. This should also be prioritised when APRM conducts its’ Country Review Mission and Member States submit their self-assessment reports. Recently South Africa’s Minister of Finance, Mr Tito Mboweni, tabled a supplementary budget to the initial February 2020 budget to ensure the country adequately responds to COVID-19. Even with a gloomy economic outlook for the country evidenced by a projected contraction of around 7.2% of the economy, inflation register of 3%, rising unemployment and disrupted global supply chains, the country has still been able to initiate an unprecedented R500 billion COVID-19 economic support package⁵.

The core focus of the South African government like many other countries has been to save as many lives as possible. To do so, three thematic areas can be identified as areas in which various stakeholders including the state, private sector, civil society and citizens collectively had to undertake. These were mainly:

1. Building state capacity and agility to ensure a comprehensive health response

A comprehensive health response would amount to naught if it didn’t confront the systemic problems that confront the South Africa health system. Although currently recording the highest number of COVID-19 confirmed cases on the continent, South Africa also has the highest number of total tests at 2,585,474 followed by Morocco at 1,065,833 (as on 23 July). In real terms however, as a percentage of test per 1 million population, it currently ranks in top five with Mauritius leading the continent⁶.

Like other countries, South Africa had to move with speed to ensure that while it still has low and manageable COVID-19 cases, it moves to build public health capacity. Various Provincial Departments of Health began to repurpose existing beds and by the 8th July 2020 the country had 40,309 COVID-19 beds. Several field hospitals have also been created across the highly dense provinces to admit mild cases to reduce the pressure on hospitals⁷.

The National Health Insurance Bill, South Africa’s equivalent universal health coverage legislation ought to be at the centre of rethinking health financing by ensuring that all citizens are provided with essential healthcare, regardless of their employment status and ability to make a direct monetary contribution to the NHI fund. Although vehemently opposed by certain quarters within the country, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to fore the strongest argument in favour of a single health system that ensures equitable access to necessary health services. When finally passed, the Act will create a leg

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4 African Union, Abuja Declaration 2001
5 https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-tito-mboweni-2020-supplementary-budget-speech-24-jun-2020-00007?gclid=EAIaIQobCh-Mi7TN_P5&gvid=9c8b5b10d6c1e1688d5a7214e5f2d0d1_d_BW
6 https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/
islative foundation through which the South African government can reconfigure the health system away from placing undue focus on curing diseases to one which is focused on preventative, promotive and rehabilitative health service.

2. Protecting the most vulnerable through food security and social relief

According to 2019 Statistic South Africa General Household Survey, over 17 million South Africans rely on some form of social welfare grant from the state.

Prior to the COVID-19, South Africa already spent over R193 billion on social protection. With the advent of the global pandemic, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced an additional R500 billion towards relieving the plight of those most desperately in need. This led to child support grant beneficiaries receiving an additional R300 in the month of May and an additional R500 per month from June, which is expected to continue till the end of October 2020. Government went further to create an additional special safety net grant for those unemployed individuals who do not qualify for any current form of social grant or an Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) grant and those who fell in this category were to receive R350 for a period of six months. Although not sufficient for some families, such grants go a long way in relieving people from hunger. South Africa needs to reimagine how disbursement of such grants are received by its citizens as most people have to physically collect at pay points making them a potential COVID-19 transmission hotspot.

3. A comprehensive economic response coupled with social mobilisation and human solidarity

By South African governments own admission, they have never worked so closely with private sector, labour, community and central bank. To this end the South African Reserve Bank has already reduced interest rate by 300 basis points in 2020. A R200 billion loan guarantee scheme has been set up for small and medium-sized businesses while commercial banks and insurance companies have moved to delay and reduce consumers instalment.

In conclusion, while cognisant of the fact that South Africa is still weathering through the pandemic storm, it is crucial to highlight the governance experience employed by Pretoria in managing the pandemic within the ‘Best Practise’ of APRM. The various stakeholders led by the government of South Africa need to continue seeking long term solutions to resolve the health challenges in the country. The

2 http://www.statssa.gov.za/?s=general-household-survey&sitem=publicatio
APRM processes have become an important tool for young people such as myself who are at the frontline of the pandemic to undertake peer-learning, sharing of experience and contrasting the work of other respective government in fighting the pandemic. It would be a missed opportunity for South Africa and her people not to actively pursue opportunities in this time of crisis, an 80% plan responding to challenges on the ground is after all better than a 100% plan debated in boardrooms.

Area of interest: Governance, Law, Education, Health and International trade

Current occupation: Parliamentary Liaison Officer, Gauteng Department of Health, South Africa

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the organisation.
The current state of agriculture in Nigeria: where do youth fit in?

With an estimated population of 206.1 million people, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. Currently, the Nigerian population’s median age is 18.6 years old, and according to the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 41.7% of the population is classified as youth, defined as ages 18-35 by the Nigerian national youth policy. Yet, there is widespread youth unemployment, with up to 70% of young people not enrolled in academic studies or engaged in the labour market. Agriculture presents a unique opportunity for youth; the sector is the largest contributor to the Nigerian GDP at 25.1% and employs the highest number of the Nigerian workforce at 36.4%. One would be hard-pressed to find another sector that has the ability to absorb the vast amount of youths seeking employment. Despite this, the Nigerian agriculture sector has an aging population with young people discouraged from participating.

Agriculture is a diverse and broad sector. There is no shortage of demand for agricultural products and services. As such, the industry, from farm to folk, is extremely accessible to entrepreneurs and employees who can identify and tap into opportunities. Yet, there is a steadily declining trend of youth employment and retention in agriculture. Four main factors contribute to this: the outdated agriculture education system, the lack of knowledge of technology and innovation within agribusiness, the lack of private-sector agribusiness support, and the negative and archaic perception of the sector.

Over 56 federal and state universities in Nigeria have a faculty of agriculture. In addition, the nation has three specialized universities that offer agriculture-related courses ranging from agricultural research to agricultural extension. Despite this, the sector remains deprived of human capital needed to transform and attract young talent. Current academic programmes and curriculum taught to prospective agriculturalists are outdated and disconnected from the current trends and latest modern technological advances. Theory-heavy courses fail to provide engaging learning experiences that will entice the minds of young people. Through these teachings, agricultural education prepares students to be subsistence farmers and not agripreneurs. As a result, agricultural education remains deeply unpopular among Nigerian youth and is often only studied as a last resort. This directly links to the lack of enthusiastic agricultural graduates who actively search for jobs outside of the sector; as well as those who do enter the industry but with a severe disadvantage in critical agribusiness knowledge of fundamental elements such as agricultural enterprise and the production, storage, processing, and

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marketing of agricultural produce. The agriculture education system in Nigeria needs to be revamped. Agribusiness must be taught as a business degree instead of its current position in the science faculty, incorporating structured professional development training and programmes. Also, the outdated curriculum needs to transform by integrating current data, technological advances, and best practices in the agriculture landscape to create an encompassing agribusiness curriculum that equips graduates with the skills to confidently enter the labour force and compete on a global stage.

Historically, there has been limited investments in technology, ICT, and innovations for agricultural practice in Nigeria. Archaic processes remain the primary methods for land preparation in most agricultural activities in the country. Due to these factors, the Nigerian youth are discouraged from participating in agriculture. However, young people are more likely to appreciate, learn, and adopt modern technologies. Given the pervasive misconception of agriculture being archaic, technology serves as a tool to change perceptions and attract young talent to the industry. Technological developments such as mechanisation, automation, digitisation, and information technology in agriculture foster attractive and innovative opportunities across value chains. This transformation must be enabled and propelled by Government support and favourable policies.

There is a rise in initiatives aimed at strengthening and enabling the scaling of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) that drive enhanced productivity and leverage innovation and technology\(^1\). Nourishing Africa is a prime example of this. The mission of Nourishing Africa is to “attract, empower, equip, connect and celebrate over 1 Million dynamic and innovative young entrepreneurs who will drive the profitable and sustainable growth of the African agriculture and food landscapes”\(^2\). As such, the hub serves as a platform for these stake-


\(^2\) www.nourishingafrica.com/about
holders to accelerate their work, connect with each other, and celebrate their successes on the continent. Dedicated to African agripreneurs, Nourishing Africa includes critical and current information about data, funding, African food and chefs, career opportunities, and other resources to develop one’s career in the agriculture and food industry. Through ecosystem building, more attractive jobs are created for youth, increasing household income, and uplifting vulnerable communities. It is imperative that the Government promote data-driven policymaking to support initiatives such as Nourishing Africa, thereby enhancing the current support and scaling of SMEs that are driving the food and agriculture transformation in Nigeria.

As a young person who did not study agriculture nor intend to be in the industry, I too, had the misconception that agriculture was simply the act of farming. I credit my shift in mindset to access to information and knowledge about the emergence of ag-tech and innovation in the sector.

Now having worked in the industry as a researcher, analyst, and presently, program lead of a digital agriculture company, I am a firm believer than the sector demands better marketing in the form of agribusiness champions, amplified success stories, and more diverse news and agriculture headlines provided to the public.

Future population trend prediction in the National Bureau of Statistics 2017 Report stated that the population trend three years ago showed that any sudden economic shock could lead to higher unemployment unless new job opportunities were urgently created. In February of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic validated this prediction, leaving millions of Nigerian youth unemployed due to this unheeded warning. Now, we must address this issue in order to avoid social and political unrest, and a lack of innovation and advancement in the agriculture and food industry.

Without youth participation, the Nigerian agriculture sector will be deprived of talent, innovation, and transformation. Just as food is essential to growth and survival, youth engagement is imperative to the sector’s advancement.

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Ify Umunna

Ify Umunna is the Program Lead at Nourishing Africa. The mission of Nourishing Africa is to “attract, empower, equip, connect and celebrate over 1 Million dynamic and innovative young entrepreneurs who will drive the profitable and sustainable growth of the African agriculture and food landscapes”. As such, this hub serves as a platform for these stakeholders to accelerate their work, connect with each other, and celebrate their successes on the continent. Nourishingafrica.com provides resources and tools aimed at developing one’s career in the agri-food industry.

Ify She has international experience in gender, maternal and adolescent health and nutrition at The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Adolescent Health (WHO), Geneva; Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, London; and Girl Effect, Abuja. She previously served as the Research Officer at African Philanthropy Forum and the Gender Analyst for the Nigerian Dairy Development Project (NDDP) at Sahel.


Ify holds a Bachelor in Social Science in International Relations, Sociology and Gender and Transformation (first class) from the University of Cape Town, South Africa and a Masters in International Development with honours from the University of Warwick, United Kingdom
Innovative financing will save African countries from paying too much for debt

The traditional development funding options for African countries are becoming less favourable. The World Bank, a major traditional source of donor funds, announced in 2018 that it is reinventing itself by migrating from the model that largely relies on member states providing loans for development projects, to one in which it becomes more of a broker of private capital to be invested in development projects. But, private capital will not help African countries because the much-needed developmental investments on the continent are social in nature.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) funding is also traditionally associated with restrictive neoliberal policy conditionalities. They include strict inflation controls, high taxation, large-scale privatisations, rapid trade liberalisation and cutting government expenditure on social services. These conditions on loans technically forfeit states’ authority in governing their own economy, as national economic policies are predetermined under the loan packages.

The G20 countries and Paris club, other key sources of financial support are also intertwined with the Breton Woods systems. Their lending programs require that country must establish a track record by implementing economic adjustment programs supported by the Breton Woods institutions. Recipient country may be considered to be in default when it ceases to be a member or is no longer eligible to use the general resources of the IMF.

These circumstances leave most African countries with very little options besides issuing of international sovereign bonds in order to finance development and restructure their public debt. With 21 governments now joining the international debt market, the appetite for African bonds has been on a constant rise. There is however renewed concern about the sustainability of development financing through issuing sovereign bonds. Much of these sovereign bonds are foreign currency denominated, usually in US dollars and Euro. The total value of foreign currency sovereign bonds issued by African countries between 2018 and 2019 was more than the value of all bonds sold between 2003 and 2016.

Unsustainable debt cost
African governments are issuing and listing their Eurobonds on established international debt markets - usually London and Irish Stock Exchanges. There is however a challenge of high cost of debt with this current financing option; African countries are paying too much interest on debt. The solution requires African governments to consider other alternative innovative financing options that are less costly and sustainable.

There are two key elements that are taken into account in assessing a country’s debt financing burden. One is the level of debt based on the ratio of debt to gross domestic product (GDP). The other is the cost of servicing the debt - interest payments. Despite the debt levels on the continent averaging way below the 100% debt-to-GDP ratio mark, financial markets have created an impression of exaggerated risk sentiment on African sovereign bonds. This exaggerated perception of African debt levels has resulted in countries paying higher interest rates on debt. The premiums are much higher than those paid by other countries. In my view, these are not justified by the risk profile of African countries for two reasons. First, save for four countries - Cape Verde, Djibouti, Congo and Mozambique - all the other African countries have a debt-to-GDP ratio averaging 60%. A debt-to-GDP ratio of 60% is the IMF’s and African Monetary Co-operation Program’s threshold for prudent debt levels. The other reason is that the scale of debt issuances in Africa amounts to only 1% of the continent’s total GDP annually - whose average annual growth rate is 4%. In simple terms, this means the value of income generation is higher than the rate of government debt accumulation. These ratios give a snapshot of a country's fiscal sustainability.

On the contrary, the amount of interest expenditure has been disproportionate to the debt-to-GDP ratio. Studies show that in developed
economies, an increase of 1% in debt-to-GDP ratio is associated with an increase of between 0.02% and 0.03% in interest rates. African governments are paying interest of 5% to 16% on 10-year government bonds, compared to near zero to negative rates in Europe and America. On average, the interest repayment is the highest expenditure portion and remains the fastest growth expenditure in Sub-Saharan Africa’s fiscal budgets. This rising interest rates on Africa’s debt should be of major concern and a catalyst for countries to diversity into other innovative financing options. The outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in African countries being priced out of the sovereign bond market by high interest rates. Bond yields spiked to over double the cost for most countries intending to issue bonds. It is thus imperative for African countries to consider other innovative options to finance development.

Solutions
There are a number of key areas of leverage on; the potentially positive returns and long-term nature of the development projects that will be funded with the money raised, the continent’s high economic growth that has been consistently positive averaging 3.6% over the last decade and, Africa’s significant progress in governance, economic growth and human development over the past years.

African governments need to venture offshore a lot less by supporting the development of their own domestic financial markets to be active and liquid. This in itself will attract international investor participation locally at less borrowing costs. Governments must also take control of the financing options and exercise their sovereign privilege to accept or reject those that are unsustainable. These processes should not be entirely renounced to syndicates of lead-managers, originators and investment banks. Governments should also prioritise financing productive projects and manage funds more prudently with integrity and transparency.

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5 https://www.pgpf.org/blog/2019/05/higher-national-debt-means-higher-interest-rates-for-the-federal-government
6 https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GC.XPN.INTP.RV.ZS?locations=AO&view=chart
Incorporating Africa’s youth into the AU and UN developmental goals

Africa’s youth are confronted with an increasingly complex socio-economic and political context which is hindering their development. Youth are facing extensive poverty, limited access to education, lack of employment opportunities, limited benefits from globalisation, water scarcity, peace and security challenges, violent extremism, sexual violence, corruption, and forced migration, to name just a few. In the spirit of ‘never letting a crisis go to waste’, during this Covid-19 pandemic, it is worthwhile to revisit the topic of African youth’s contributions to continental and global development goals, as articulated in the AU Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the 2020 outlook for most African youth is bleak. Youth in the informal sector have been particularly hard hit, and for those in the formal sector, especially in wholesale and retail trade, hotels, bars and restaurants, the downturn in economic activity means that most of the youth are potentially the first ones to be laid off. Social security relief measures provided by African countries cannot sufficiently cushion the impact of the pandemic. Nonetheless, during these difficult times, African youth development stakeholders have an opportunity to rethink and reset youth’s participation and contribution to development.

What Agenda 2063 and the UN SDGs say about the youth

It is crucial to note that Agenda 2063 and the UN SDGs have well laid out implementation programmes and initiatives, many of which are premised on central government leadership and control. The SDGs have been integrated in most development plans of governments.

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across the continent, while the same is not entirely true for Agenda 2063, although at the continental level, there exists the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan for Agenda 2063 complete with flagship projects\(^2\). However, if one considers the congruence between the SDGs and the Agenda 2063 of almost 90%, it means that implementing the SDGs is akin to implementing of Agenda 2063\(^3\).

The UN has made it clear that young people are partners in the implementation of the SDGs. Information on UN websites shows that young people were actively involved in the development of SDGs and continue to be engaged in the frameworks and processes that support its implementation, follow-up and review at the global level. However, it appears that African youth have largely been left behind when it comes to the implementation, follow up and review of these goals across the continent.

### Opportunities for engagement with Africa’s youth

Outside the international development sector and the government sector, few youths are aware that world leaders have come to a historic, far-reaching agreement to improve the lives of people and the planet by 2030 as well as aspiring for a better continent by 2063. If both Agenda 2063 and SDGs are adequately disseminated to African young people in their languages and without the international development jargonistic terms, surely African young people can be partners in communicating the development agenda to their communities at the local level, as well as across countries and regions.

Ownership of the SDGs by African youth is one of the low hanging fruits that stakeholders can utilise in harnessing meaningful participation by young people. One could recommend an increase in partnership between UN agencies

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3. Ibid
and youth led NGOs and grassroots activists, for example. African governments could also play a role through increased budgeting and national sensitisation of the people. Importantly as recommended by the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) bi-annual Africa Governance Report, African governments can align national planning and budgeting with the SDGs. Budgets for youth could incorporate the SDGs and youth specific actions towards their attainment.

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the SDGs on the African continent has also been slow. As of 2017, the APRM, upon receiving its expanded mandate of monitoring Agenda 2063 and the SDGs, has aided African countries in developing their Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) and presenting them to the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development. However, actions and progress of the youth in the contributing to the SDGs are not given focus in the VNRs. This is a gap and an opportunity for youth led organisations harness.

In Agenda 2063’s Aspiration 6, youth are mentioned as the cornerstone of the plan’s achievement. Reassuringly, the AU over the past decade has responded by initiating numerous flagship programmes aimed at empowering the youth and bringing the continental organisation’s ideals closer to this important demographic. The establishment of the Office of the AU Youth Envoy and the Advisory Council attests to this. Another noteworthy initiative is the ‘1 Million By 2021’ aimed at concretely reaching millions of African youth from across the continent with opportunities and interventions in the key areas of Employment, Entrepreneurship, Education and Engagement (4Es). These initiatives are geared to accelerate socio-economic development on the continent.

The centrality of youth in Africa’s main development agenda further reinforces the ideals enshrined in the African Youth Charter (AYC) that demands youth empowerment from African governments but equally requires youth to take responsibility for their own development.

Since the launch of Agenda 2063, African young people have voiced out their concerns regarding the lack of their inclusion in decision-making platforms and lack of funding for their projects. Platforms such as YouthConnekt and the African Governance Architecture (AGA) Consultative Series have been useful in youth engagement and sharing of experiences, best practices and peer learning in advancing Africa’s development.

The post-pandemic era is an opportunity for policy makers and stakeholders involved in implementing programmes aligned with the 12 Key Flagship Agenda 2063’s projects with youth development. For instance, the recently launched Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) could be a starting point. Youth will be beneficiaries of the free movement of goods and services, and by extension, the free movement of people through the implementation of the AfCFTA flagship project.

In both the implementation of SDGs and Agenda 2063, the youth’s critical thinking ability should be leveraged. The advantage of youth is their ability to approach problems and solutions differently from the accepted approaches to development. Some of the ideas being pursued in Agenda 2063 and the SDGs have been around for many years, periodically repackaged and renamed. Youth can identify and challenge entrenched norms and ideals that exclude them in socio-economic endeavours as well as challenge existing power structures.

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4 Ibid
8 AU Youth Charter. [Online 2 June 2020], available from https://www.africa-youth.org/frameworks/african-youth-charter/
If the internet accessibility and high cost challenge is resolved one can only imagine the improved African youth contributions towards the aspirations of SDGs and Agenda 2063. The 4th Industrial Revolution is yet another good opportunity for African countries to enhance their youth participation in ongoing development blueprints. Given that approximately 60% of African people are not connected to the internet, access to affordable and reliable internet will be a game changer in this regard.

Concluding remarks

In this Covid-19 global pandemic that is altering the economic and social landscapes of African countries, the youth have proved to be reliable partners in defeating the pandemic. Young people’s role in the effective implementation of Agenda 2063 and SDGs need attention more than ever. The pandemic has reminded us that activists on the ground, policy makers, the government, private sectors need to combine efforts and refrain from working in silos.

The pandemic should be a reminder to African governments, the private sector, international development agencies and youth development stakeholders that Africa is abundantly blessed with a youth population that can leapfrog Africa’s development. Extensive work is needed now to make African youth the engine that drives Africa’s development. More actions as opposed to policy pronouncements is needed. The current political commitment from all actors regarding youth development needs to be supported by funding and improved follow up actions and reporting. Youth development stakeholders should be reminded that youth contributions to SDGs and Agenda 2063 present an opportunity for Africa.


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Picture this scenario: 19-year-old African citizen finishes secondary school and is keen to pursue further studies. Faced with a growing list of uncertainties in a pandemic-ridden world affected by lockdowns and border closures, she does her inquiry, looks into higher education prospects, and starts weighing different options’ pros and cons. Questions she is likely to ponder:

“Do I choose a local university or is the experience better abroad?” If she goes by university rankings data, her options on the African continent may seem limited given that Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa are the only three African countries to have universities in the top 500 of the global ranking. “Do I opt for a public university in my home country?” Feedback suggests negative learning experiences at public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Africa due to an excessive student enrolment beyond public institutions’ capacity. “Given that cross-border mobility is reduced, is it best to choose an institution that guarantees a good quality online course?” In the current context, that could potentially be a worthy option and the way forward given that even the African Union’s Agenda 2063 is envisioning an African Virtual and E-University on the continent. Nonetheless, the recurring issues of digital infrastructure and connectivity restrictions that several African countries continue to experience are troubling truths.

This list of questions can be expanded to include education costs, worries about the course to study, and post-graduation employability prospects among other queries that a prospective higher education student will likely contemplate. The data available to shed light on some of these queries revealed is a grim reality about the overall state of higher education in Africa especial-

ly in comparison with other regions. Higher education organisational frameworks across the diverse countries on the African continent are yet to catch up with the rest of the world. Data from the International Association of Universities (IAU) show that “While in Asia and Pacific (99%), the Americas (97%) and Europe (97%) almost all HEIs [indicated] to have infrastructures in place to communicate about COVID-19, in Africa this percentage is lower (66%). There is one third of African HEIs that [had] no communication infrastructures in place”⁴. Another recent study by Mawazo Institute highlights that only 38.5% of the 501 higher education students they surveyed are at institutions offering e-learning options⁴.

The pandemic that disrupted global higher education delivery has unearthed inherent vulnerabilities in the African higher education systems. While it is unproductive to simplify the diverse countries’ higher education systems’ performance into one generalised explanation, there are several lessons to extract from them. The IAU’s demographics data pinpoint to a gap in communication infrastructures and access to reliable internet as important barriers affecting access to online learning. Meanwhile, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation’s 2019 report shows that “African youth are increasingly benefitting from improvements in digital and information and technology infrastructure, having better access to computers, mobile phones and the internet. 15-24 year olds in Africa are 2.3 times more likely to use the internet compared to the African population as a whole, in contrast to 1.3 times in Europe”⁵. On the question about whether Africa is ready to accommodate the online educational transition, the current answer is no. This is a disconcerting reality because it is at the expense of its youth’s readiness to embrace online technologies.

To improve African higher education’s effectiveness, sound government decisions are needed that should be carried out in consultation with a range of stakeholders from both the public and private sector. In addition to technological connectivity, HEIs’ performance is intertwined with governments’ national networks. Service providers in the sectors of education and IT are influenced by market realities such as taxes and incentives that governments should ideally revisit with a clear strategy to encourage and promote the benefits of online learning rather than being purely guided by economic motives to lure foreign investments.

To reach the hardest hit by the pandemic whose higher education prospects notably through e-learning are diminished due to socio-economic or gender inequalities, HEIs are also responsible to develop strategies that leave no student behind. This can predominantly happen if governments’ strategies are to leave no university behind. They both are co-dependent. For example, the most

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affected programmes by the rapid transition online prompted by the pandemic are in science and technology mainly because for practice purposes, students need access to laboratories. As part of Africa’s development, such programmes are important as highlighted by the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted by governments at the World Summit on Sustainable Development that accentuated the role of science and technology in meeting sustainable development goals. The plan recommends “building and/or strengthening centres of excellence in science and technology as well as HEIs in Africa” and steering science and technology resources to address issues of “energy deficiency, food insecurity, environmental degradation, diseases, water insecurity and many other sustainable development challenges”.

Although there have been noteworthy dialogues to strengthen research output on science, technology, and innovation with impact for Africa, these have been initiatives in collaboration with other regional organisations as has been the case between the African Union and European Union. In light of the current pandemic, can the bulk of research initiatives in Africa continue to rely on funding from organisations and foundations found in Europe, the United States, and lately China? It is important to ask whether the latter will continue to support international research collaboration given that the pandemic is currently affecting their own HEIs. This reality should not undermine African governments’ support for research in general. In addition to addressing inherent structural issues of connectivity, equitable accessibility, and enhancing good governance practices in quality assurance, it is also time to enhance multi-country collaborative research within the continent itself.

In a post-pandemic world, African governments’ priorities must remain on addressing the chronic lack of infrastructure to deliver e-learning, bridging the gap in access to smart technology, and empowering HEIs to deliver optimal online teaching and learning. Africa’s population is set to double by 2050 leading to the continued demand for higher education. An important government goal is to work towards encouraging prospective students to study at local universities on the continent. For this to materialise, governments will need to work towards creating a framework for higher education systems that supports inclusive, equitable, accessible, and good quality learning.
UPCOMING ACTIVITIES FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE YEAR 2020

TARGETED REVIEW

The purpose of the Targeted Review is to provide African Countries with an independent, credible and legitimate analyses of and solutions to a specific question, needed to address the governance and developmental challenges pertaining to the question. Such a review would be among others based on the AU theme of the year or an APRM thematic area. Through this initiative, the APRM intends to enhance the relevance of the reviews to African Countries seeking to address governance challenges that affect the overall development of their societies and the continent at large. Based on the above objective, the Targeted Review Unit is undertaking the activities listed in the table below:

Activities to be performed in the year 2020

The following missions were successfully completed before Covid-19 travel restriction.

- Following the Peer Review of Namibia Targeted Review Report on Youth Unemployment that took place at the 29th APR Forum held on 8 February 2020 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the Targeted Review Team and the Republic of Namibia are getting ready to launch the Report in the course of 2020.

Virtual Missions:

- A two-day sensitisation workshop is scheduled to take place in the course of 2020 to sensitise members of the Government of the Republic of Tchad, Members of the National Governance Council and the National Secretariat on the planned Targeted Review Field Mission.

Targeted Review Mission to Sierra Leone

The Republic of Sierra Leone has shown its interest in Targeted Review activities and these activities were kick started with the Virtual Sensitization meeting. The country’s topic is on Health Governance and Covid-19 Response in the Republic of Sierra Leone. The Targeted Review Team has drafted a roadmap for the Sierra Leone Targeted Review. The team has also drafted the ToRs for the recruitment of the consultants on Public Health, Disaster Management System and a Statistician. An international consultant will also be recruited to draft the report. Once the recruitment of consultants is completed, the team will start the drafting of background papers, key issues paper, questionnaires and other relevant documents.

Targeted Review Mission to Tchad

The Republic of Chad has also shown its interest in Targeted Review activities. The topic of the Targeted Review will be related to Covid-19. The Tchad Targeted Review process will kick start with the Virtual Sensitization meeting scheduled for 2020.
Launch of the Sovereign Credit Rating Review report
14 August 2020

Pilot Support to member states on credit rating agencies
1 September - 31 December 2020

Adhoc Committee meeting of Experts
2 September 2020