



Towards 2063: a grand vision

The past few decades have witnessed extraordinary progress in Africa. Looking ahead, the continent's leaders envisage a more prosperous, peaceful future, under the frameworks of the African Union's Agenda 2063 and Strategic Plan 2014-2017, writes **Wendy Atkins**

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Today's picture of Africa looks quite different to that at the start of the 21st century, with economic development, increased foreign direct investment (FDI), greater stability and talk of an African renaissance dominating the headlines. But the continent stands at a crossroads, and, in spite of an increasing number of good news stories, it still faces challenges. In particular, it needs growth to be more inclusive and less commodity driven. It wants to create more jobs, especially for women and young people, and needs to make more progress in combating poverty and income inequality. Nutrition, water and food security also have to be addressed.

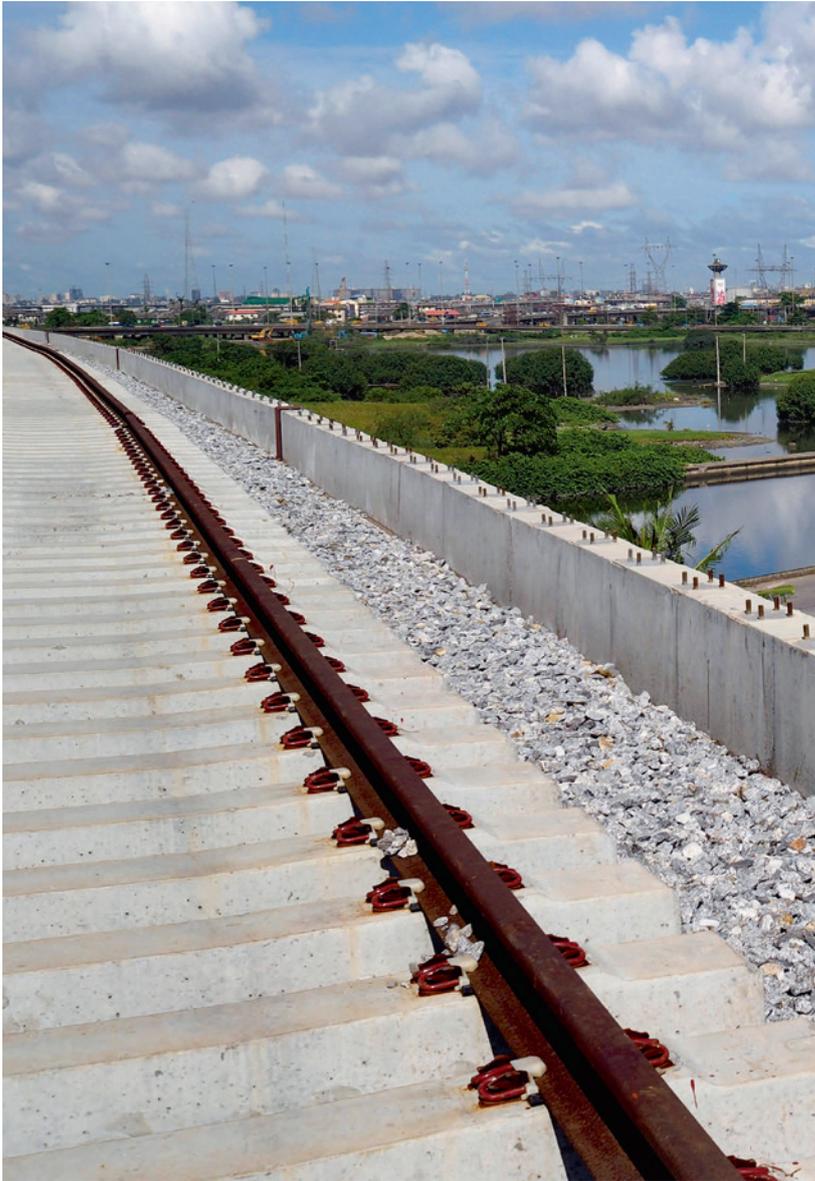
To this end, Africa's leaders are committed to ensuring the continent remains competitive, and

have signed up to a number of initiatives, including the ambitious 50-year Agenda 2063 vision, and the African Union (AU) Commission Strategic Plan 2014-2017. If these prove successful, it will lead to socio-economic transformation and continental integration.

A brighter future for Africa

At the heart of Agenda 2063 is a series of aspirations: an integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideal of pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's renaissance; an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law; a prosperous Africa whose people have a good standard of living based on inclusive growth, sustainable development and the eradication of

Construction workers building a ring road in Mozambique's capital city, Maputo. Agenda 2063 sets out plans for greater road connectivity in the next 10 years



JOE PENNEY/REUTERS

A light rail system under construction in Lagos, Nigeria. Building strong infrastructure networks will underpin economic growth; as such, this is one of the priorities of the African Union's strategy

poverty; a peaceful and secure continent; and an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, and shared values and ethics.

Agenda 2063 consists of a rolling programme of 25-year, 10-year, five-year and short-term action plans, and builds on earlier strategies, including the Lagos Plan of Action, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Abuja Treaty. The objective of the agenda is to encourage every segment of society to work together in order to build a prosperous and united Africa that is based on shared values and a common destiny. It also aims to be fully participatory and owned by all of the continent's stakeholders, with the full engagement of women and youth, in particular.

It is timely for a number of reasons: globalisation and the information technology (IT) revolution have provided numerous opportunities for countries and regions with the right policies to make significant advances and lift huge sections of the population out of poverty. The continent also has strong and well-functioning regional institutions on which Agenda 2063 can build, including the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the South African Development Community (SADC) and the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA).

There have been reductions in armed conflicts, improved peace and stability, and advances in democratic governance. What is more, there is a fast-expanding and broad-based entrepreneurial and middle class, along with a large youth population, which can act as catalysts for further growth and technological progress. And, in the business world, changes in international finance architecture, the rise of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) economies and improved flows of FDI into Africa beyond commodity-producing sectors are all areas that can be built on.

However, success is by no means assured. Those involved in driving the initiative recognise that possible major risks and critical success factors include regional politics, institutional renewal and issues related to financing and resource mobilisation, as well as the changing nature of Africa's relationship with the rest of the world.

A foundation for growth

Infrastructure development is crucial to the continent's achieving its potential. As a result of high transport costs, including high freight rates, delayed delivery fees, freight losses and missed opportunities, the competitiveness of African products in local and international markets is undermined. Steps to address inadequate, poor-quality and poorly functioning transport infrastructure and related services are being welcomed by stakeholders.

Those behind the agenda say that, by 2063, the necessary infrastructure will be in place to support Africa's accelerated integration and growth, technological transformation, trade and development. This includes high-speed railway networks, roads, shipping lines and sea and air transport, as well as a well-developed IT sector capable of supporting an advanced digital economy. A pan-African high-speed rail network will connect all the major cities and

capitals, with adjacent highways and pipelines for gas, oil and water, as well as high-speed telecoms cabling and other infrastructure.

This infrastructure expansion will be a catalyst for the growth of manufacturing, research and development, advances in skills and technology, and improvements in integration and intra-African trade, investment and tourism. Intra-African commerce is forecast to grow from less than 12 per cent in 2013 to almost 50 per cent by 2045, and the continent's share of global trade to rise from two per cent to 12 per cent.

A shift in thinking

The Strategic Plan 2014-2017 serves as a launch pad for the broader aims of Agenda 2063. It was adopted at the 21st Ordinary Session of the African Union (AU) Assembly in May 2013, and is the third phase of the AU's strategic plan. It builds on the first phase of 2004-07, which prioritised the building of infrastructure in order to accelerate socio-economic

development and integration, and the second phase of 2009-12, which focused on the transport sector. The key objective of the latest phase is implementing the Programme of Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), and covers the transport, energy, IT and

trans-boundary water sectors. Furthermore, it marks a shift in thinking, as it focuses on engaging all stakeholders, including the AU's member states, agencies and Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC); as well as Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the private sector, civil society, the media, development partners, and Africa's citizens – whether they are at home or abroad.

The plan aims to accelerate the creation of the foundations of an integrated, people-centred, prosperous and peaceful continent in the short to medium term. As such, it identifies eight priorities and concerns that need to be addressed:

- 1 Promote peace and stability, including regional initiatives, good governance, democracy and human rights as a foundation for inclusion, security and development of the continent.

- 2 Expand agricultural production, develop the agro-processing and businesses sectors, increase market access and ensure Africa's collective food and nutritional self-sufficiency by promoting smallholder agriculture, environmental protection and natural resource management, including protecting against climate change.
- 3 Promote inclusive economic development and industrialisation through the acceleration of infrastructure projects that will aid economic integration and the utilisation of the continent's mineral and other natural resources.
- 4 Build Africa's human capacity by prioritising primary healthcare and prevention; education, skills development and investment in science, research and innovation; and access to clean water and sanitation, ensuring inclusion of vulnerable groups.
- 5 Ensure that the needs of women and young people are an integral part of the AU and the development of the continent.
- 6 Implement resource mobilisation strategies, with special emphasis on alternative sources of funding and/or additional funding, to enable Africa to finance its development.
- 7 Strengthen a people-centred AU through active communication of its programmes, its branding and the participation of member states and other stakeholders in defining and implementing the African agenda.
- 8 Strengthen the institutional capacity of the AU Commission (AUC), RECs and other organs, and their relations with other partners.

Steps have been taken with other international organisations to put Agenda 2063 and the Strategic Plan 2014-2017 on a strong footing. For example, the World Bank Group and the AUC agreed an International Development Association (IDA) grant of \$25 million in August 2014 to support the expansion of the AUC's activities. This funding will assist the AUC in the implementation of both initiatives.

There is no doubting the scale of the ambitions of Africa's leaders. As Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said in a speech at Chatham House in 2013: "If we continue to build on our achievements and try to overcome the challenges facing us, there is no reason why we will not be able to translate the dreams of our founding fathers into a reality.

"If... economies like Korea and Singapore achieved middle-income status in three decades, I am confident that Africa will make it in the next five decades or less." ●

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