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Overview of Economic and Social conditions in Africa in 2008*

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A. Introduction

Economic performance in Africa declined in 2008 and is projected to slow steeply in 2009. Africa's economic downturn is spurred by the financial turmoil that originated in the USA and affected most countries of the world. For the continent as a whole, despite this decline, fiscal and current account balances have improved and domestic savings and investment rates increased due mainly to high commodity prices in the first half of 2008. However, Africa's average inflation rate rose significantly, threatening macroeconomic stability and food security in many countries. Also, economic performance in Africa, driven mainly by revenues from oil and mineral exports in resource-rich countries, conceals considerable variation across countries and remains insufficient for Africa to meet the MDGs.

The continent needs short-term measures to mitigate the economic and social impact of the global downturn as well as long-term measures to accelerate and sustain broad-based growth and reduce vulnerability to external shocks. While food prices are generally declining, they remain above historical levels in some countries and many African countries still face the challenge of mounting food shortages due to production constraints and inadequate emergency planning and assistance. In addition to falling commodity prices, slowing official and private capital inflows threaten the recent achievements made by many African countries in terms of sound macroeconomic and public expenditure management and progress towards meeting the MDGs.

B. Developments in the Global Economy

In 2008, the burst of the United States housing bubble quickly spread to the rest of the world through the global financial network. The credit crunch that ensued made banks less willing to lend to each other and to consumers, drying up liquidity in the process, while risk perceptions started to rise sharply. The destruction of trillions of dollars in wealth has dragged down household spending on durable goods as well as corporate investments (United Nations 2009).

World growth declined from 3.7 per cent in 2007 to 2.5 per cent in 2008 and a global recession is expected for 2009, with substantive negative growth rates in industrialized countries. The US economy is in recession since the end of 2007. In the Euro area, Japan and the UK, GDP is expected to decline by more than 4 per cent in 2009. The fact that all major industrialized countries are expected to slide into recession at the same time is unprecedented (IMF 2009a).

Indeed, all developing regions have been affected by the crises with growth already slowing down in 2008. For 2009, a further slowdown is expected, driven by a decline in both foreign and domestic demand. For most developing regions, especially Asia, a significant growth of GDP is expected for 2009, but growth projections are constantly revised downward since the beginning of 2009 and some countries such as Mexico and Russia are expected to experience a fall in GDP (IMF 2009a). It is worth noting that

economic developments in the first quarter of 2009 and the uncertainty about the size and effectiveness of the various rescue packages make projections highly uncertain. There is a considerable downside risk with a more severe global economic recession and greater decline in GDP growth in most regions.

The financial crisis and world recession will have significant effects on current account and fiscal balances. Japan and developing Asia, including China, have experienced a decline in current account surpluses in 2008 while Latin America has moved from a small surplus to a small deficit. Middle Eastern countries have also seen a decline in current account surpluses with falling oil prices. Africa is one of the few regions where the current account surplus increased significantly in 2008, albeit from a low level. The fiscal balance deteriorated in industrialized countries as a whole and in all major economies and regions. This was mainly driven by lower revenues due to the growth slowdown and higher expenditure stemming from efforts to mitigate the economic and social effects of the financial crisis (United Nations 2009).

Commodity prices stabilized after a rapid decline in the second half of 2008. Both food and minerals prices had reached long-term peaks by mid-2008. The commodity price boom ended in mid-2008 as supply began to respond to the extremely high prices and demand fell due to the slowdown in the world economy. Most commodity prices had lost all their gains during the boom by the end of 2008, although some prices started to pick up a bit at the beginning of 2009. Oil prices have broadly stabilized and are expected to rise slowly in 2010.

Average world inflation increased from 3.5 per cent in 2007 to around 6 per cent in mid-2008, the highest rise since the late 1990s. However, as world demand declined in the wake of the financial crisis, most commodity prices also declined, easing global inflationary pressures. Accordingly, and in view of rising unemployment and contained wage increases, inflation rates for 2009 are expected to fall back to the 2007 levels in most regions. This has prompted most industrialized countries to ease monetary policies, with zero or close to zero interest rates in the US, Japan and the UK (ECB 2009).

Global trade, foreign direct investment (FDI) and remittances continued to grow in 2008 but will also be adversely affected by the recession in 2009. Growth in world trade slowed in 2008 due to slowing demand in OECD countries and mounting difficulties in obtaining trade credit. In the fourth quarter of 2008, world trade declined by 6 per cent quarter on quarter and a further contraction is expected for 2009. Fiscal expansion induced by stimulus packages, mainly implemented by rich countries, is likely to have relatively low impact on foreign trade; the packages are designed to stimulate domestic demand, including public expenditure on infrastructure and basic services. Another factor contributing to the expected fall in trade is the observed tendency towards protectionism in some countries in the form of tariff increases, non-tariff barriers, and subsidies (ECB 2009, World Bank 2009a).

C. Overall Economic Performance in Africa

Africa's economic growth rate down in 2008

Economic growth in Africa in 2008 was 5.1 per cent, down from 6 per cent in 2007 (figure 1). The main driver of growth in Africa was the rise in commodity prices, especially oil. Oil-exporting African countries contributed 61.4 per cent to the overall growth of the continent and grew at 5.9 per cent compared to 4.4 per cent for the non-oil countries. In addition to the robust effect of high commodity prices, it is important to underscore the other key factors, especially good macroeconomic policies and institutional reforms, underpinning high growth performance in Africa in recent years. In many African countries, the adoption of sound and sustained macroeconomic policy has helped boost the confidence of both domestic and foreign investors and stimulate growth.

Moreover, by strengthening economic and corporate governance, including measures to combat corruption, undertaking reforms to improve the business environment and consolidating peace in many conflict areas, the continent has attracted significant private capital inflows and stimulated private sector development. Doing business has become easier in Africa as many countries have implemented many reforms in recent years. For example, in 2007/2008, 28 economies implemented 58 reforms as compared to 24 economies and 49 reforms in the year before. The pace of reforms is gathering momentum with a 70 per cent rise in the number of countries reforming between 2005 and 2008. Consequently, in 2008 Africa's regional ranking on the pace of reform improved to third place after Europe and Central Asia, up from fifth place in 2007. Three African countries (Senegal, Burkina Faso and Botswana) are among the top 10 in doing business reformers in 2007/2008 (World Bank 2009b).

Finally, increased donor assistance and debt relief have helped many countries free up resources for investment in infrastructure, human capital development and poverty reduction. As a result, many low-income African countries have begun to diversify their production base, improve trade capacity and increase productivity as well as exports. In terms of volume, Africa's exports of goods and services increased by 13 per cent between 2006 and 2008, while imports increased by 6.6 per cent over the same period. However, the continent's terms of trade increased by only 1.4 per cent annually during this period.

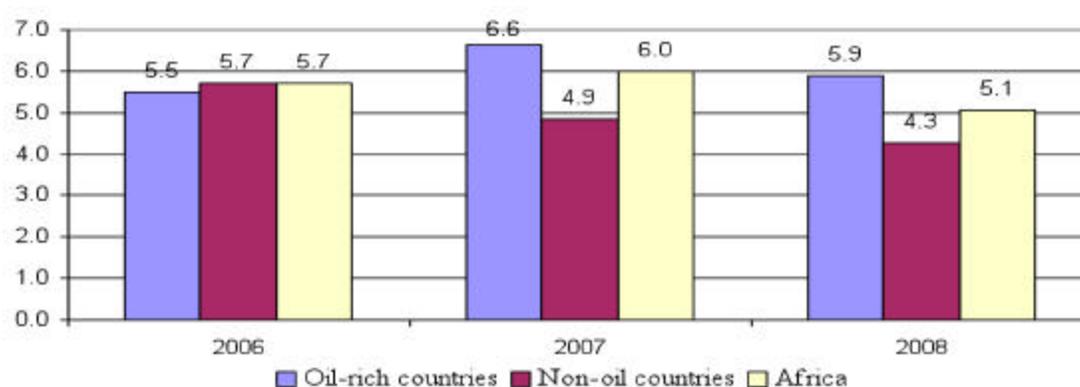
The role played by high commodity prices, political stability, and sound macroeconomic policies in Africa's growth performance in 2008 manifested itself in how individual countries performed. Although eight of the top ten performers are mineral-rich or oil-exporting countries and one country (Liberia) is a post conflict case, improved macroeconomic management characterizes many of the high performing economies.¹ On the other hand, all the least performing countries (the Comoros, Chad, Eritrea, Guinea,

¹ The top performing African countries in 2008 were: Angola (12.9 per cent), Equatorial Guinea (9 per cent), Liberia and Ethiopia (8 per cent each), Congo, Republic (7.8 per cent), DRC (7.2 per cent), Tanzania (6.8 per cent, Malawi 96.6 per cent), and Egypt and Botswana (6.5 per cent each).

Somalia and Zimbabwe) have either experienced severe political instability or external shocks or both. Diversification of production and exports remains a priority for both top and bottom performers.

In addition to strategies to diversify production and exports, sustaining sound macroeconomic management, institutional reforms, improved mobilization of domestic resources and increasing non-debt generating external capital inflows are critical for Africa to maintain growth in a turbulent global economic environment. In this context, the international community must also play its part in helping African oil-importing low-income countries that need external support to mitigate the economic and social effects of the global recession, food shortages and low export earnings.

Figure 1: Growth in Africa, oil vs. non-oil Economies, 2006-2008 (%)



Source : UN-DESA, November (2008).

Growth performance continues to vary considerably across subregions and countries

GDP growth decelerated in three of the five subregions of the continent in 2008 (table 1). West and Central Africa grew at 5.4 and 4.9 per cent in 2008, compared with 5.2 and 3.9 per cent in 2007, respectively. In 2008, GDP growth rates decreased in North Africa (to 5.4 per cent), East Africa (5.7 per cent) and Southern Africa (4.2 per cent). High commodity demand and prices are still among the key factors supporting growth in all African subregions.

Table 1: Subregional Growth Performance, 2006-2008 (%)

	2006	2007	2008
East Africa	6.2	6.3	5.7
Southern Africa	6.1	6.2	4.2
North Africa	5.8	5.9	5.4
West Africa	4.6	5.2	5.4
Central Africa	1.8	3.9	4.9
Africa	5.7	6.0	5.1

Source: UN-DESA, November (2008a).

Despite the slowdown, East Africa maintained the highest growth on the continent over 2006-2008. Again, Ethiopia led the subregion with an 8.0 per cent real GDP growth rate in 2008, followed by DRC (7.2), Tanzania (6.8 per cent), Seychelles (6.2 per cent), Uganda (6.0 per cent), Rwanda (5.8 per cent), Madagascar (5.2 per cent), and Burundi and Djibouti (5.0 per cent each). Growth plummeted in Kenya from 6.1 per cent to 3.5 per cent, due largely to post-elections violence and a sharp fall in tourism. Growth remained weak in Eritrea (1.0 per cent) owing to poor rainfall, weak agricultural production and a poor business environment. Political instability disrupted tourism and FDI inflows as well as overall growth in the Comoros (0.5 per cent).

Growth factors in East Africa included expansion in agriculture, horticulture, and services, especially finance, telecommunications and construction. The subregion also benefited from healthy inflows of aid and strong growth in tourism and FDI. However, growth in some East African countries such as Uganda remains constrained by infrastructure bottlenecks, especially energy and transportation.

High oil revenues and tourism receipts continued to boost growth in North Africa. Egypt grew at 6.5 per cent, followed by Libya (6.2 per cent), the Sudan (6.0 per cent), Morocco (5.1 per cent) and Tunisia (4.8 per cent). Economic growth recovered markedly in Mauritania (from 1 per cent in 2007 to 4.2 per cent in 2008), but declined in Algeria (from 4.6 per cent to 3.3 per cent). Besides the strong rise in oil and mineral exports that boosted both public and private consumption in most countries, North Africa saw a rebound in agricultural output as well as a construction boom due to high demand for tourism and residential buildings. Growth slowed in Tunisia owing to food and oil costs and weaker EU demand for exports, and in the Sudan due to declining oil production.

In West Africa, GDP growth was strong in most countries, thanks to accelerated recovery in Liberia (8.0 per cent), increased oil production and prices and growth in non-oil sectors in Nigeria (6.1 per cent each), high FDI inflows and remittances in Cape Verde (5.8 per cent), and expansion in mining activity in Sierra Leone (5.8 per cent), Ghana (6.0 per cent) and Burkina Faso (4.3 per cent). Growth in construction and tourism together with high public spending underpinned a high GDP growth rate in the Gambia (5.8 per cent). Growth also remained high in Benin (4.7 per cent) with a recovery in re-export activity, cotton production and strong growth in construction.

Strong activity in the mining and service sectors, among other factors, has supported growth in Senegal (4.6 per cent), and the Niger (4.0 per cent), whereas growth in Mali (3.9 per cent) benefited from fast expansion in the non-mining sector. Economic performance was relatively weak in other countries of the subregion. Guinea-Bissau grew at 3.3 per cent thanks to a recovery in agricultural output and rising donor support, Togo at 2.9 per cent due to growth in cotton production and in manufacturing and services. Recovery in the oil sector and peace dividends underpinned a 2.8 per cent growth in Cote d'Ivoire in 2008, while political upheavals condemned Guinea to a 2.0 per cent growth rate.

Economic performance in Central Africa accelerated from 3.9 per cent in 2007 to 4.9 per cent in 2008, thanks largely to increased public investment in infrastructure in Equatorial Guinea (9.0 per cent), significant expansion in oil production and activity in the non-oil sector in the Republic of Congo (7.8 per cent), and Gabon (3.9 per cent). Growth also remained high in Sao Tome and Principe (5.3 per cent) despite delays in the disbursement of some donor funds and the impact of high inflation and energy costs.

Growth improved in Central African Republic (to 4.4 per cent) with the resumption of donor support and the improved political situation, and in Cameroon (to 3.9 per cent) as a result of developments in infrastructure and exploitation of natural resources. Despite improvement, Chad (1.0 per cent) remains the least performing country in the subregion as a result of political conflict and the erratic flow and management of oil revenue.

Southern Africa's economic performance slowed from 6.2 per cent in 2007 to 4.2 per cent in 2008 as most of the larger economies posted lower growth rates. Despite deceleration, Angola maintained the highest growth rate in the subregion in 2008 (12.9 per cent), followed by Malawi (6.6 per cent), Botswana (6.5 per cent), Mozambique (6.2 per cent), Zambia (5.9 per cent), Mauritius (5.4 per cent), Lesotho (5.0 per cent), and Namibia (3.5 per cent). GDP growth slowed sharply in South Africa (from 5.1 per cent in 2007 to 3.1 per cent in 2008), and remained low in Swaziland (2.0 per cent), while Zimbabwe's economy continued to contract (-4.5 per cent).

D. Macroeconomic Imbalances Largely Driven by Commodity Shocks

Increasing fiscal deficits in oil-importing countries

The sharp increase in oil and food prices in the first half of 2008 has had different impacts on fiscal balances in oil and non-oil African economies. Eighty six per cent of oil-importing countries recorded fiscal deficits in 2008, up from 76 per cent in 2007 (table 2). On the other hand, the combined fiscal surplus of oil-exporting African countries amounted to 7.7 per cent of GDP in 2008, up from 5 per cent in 2007. All the 10 countries with the largest fiscal surplus are either oil-rich (7 countries) or mineral-rich (3 countries), which indicates that the overall relatively favourable fiscal position of the continent is a mere indication of the fiscal position of oil-exporting countries. The data shows that with the exception of Ghana and Egypt, all the top 10 deficit-countries were subjected to political conflict and/or external shocks.

Despite the deficit position of the majority of the countries, fiscal management has been sound in most countries as the deficit remained below 5 per cent of GDP in 79 per cent of the deficit countries. While many governments raised revenues by widening the tax base and improving tax collection, public expenditure also increased at higher rates owing to high food and energy prices and the need to mitigate their impact especially on the poor. To contain mounting fiscal deficits, some African governments have reduced expenditures on public services and development projects. In the context of the global economic downturn, such measures will have significant negative social effects, highlighting the

need for increased external support including aid, debt relief as well as concessional lending facilities by international financial institutions.

Table 2: Distribution of Fiscal Deficits in Africa in 2008 (42 countries)

	Oil countries	Non-oil countries	Mineral-rich	Non-mineral-rich	Sub-Saharan Countries
Countries with surpluses	8	4	2	2	10
Less than 5 per cent	2	3	1	2	5
5 per cent to 10 per cent	0	1	1	0	1
More than 10 per cent	6	0	0	0	4
Countries with deficits	5	25	8	17	26
Less than 5 per cent	4	18	5	13	19
5 per cent to 10 per cent	1	5	2	3	5
More than 10 per cent	0	2	1	1	2
Total number of countries	13	29	10	19	36

Source: UNECA calculations based on data from EIU, November 2008.

Note: Due to data limitations, only 42 countries are covered. The 11 excluded countries are Central African Republic, Comoros, DRC, Djibouti, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Sierra Leone and Somalia.

Africa experienced high inflation rates in 2008

Inflation in Africa, excluding Zimbabwe, was 10.7 per cent in 2008, up from 6.4 per cent in 2007. Over 90 per cent of the 52 African countries with available data recorded a 5 per cent or more inflation rate in 2008, up from 60 per cent of them in 2007 (table 3). Only three countries (Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, and the Comoros) had inflation rates of less than 5 per cent in 2008. Africa's recent inflation has been mostly imported in the form of high energy and food prices associated with high global demand in the first half of 2008.

Other factors contributing to the inflationary pressure on the continent in 2008 included sustained government spending and robust domestic demand, especially in oil-exporting countries. This was the case in oil economies such as Angola, Egypt, and the Sudan, where inflation was 12.6, 17.1 per cent and 15.0 respectively. Zimbabwe aside, Ethiopia recorded the highest inflation rate (41 per cent) in Africa in 2008, owing mainly to high energy and food costs coupled with drought, followed by Guinea (30 per cent), Sao Tome and Principe (28 per cent) and Kenya (25 per cent). Zimbabwe still has the highest inflation on the continent (11 million per cent).

Table 3: Distribution of Inflation Rates in Africa, 2008 (51 countries)

Range	Africa	Oil countries	Non-oil countries	Mineral-rich	Non-oil, non-mineral rich	SSA
Less than 5%	3	1	2	1	2	3
Between 5 and 10 % (10% excluded)	23	7	16	5	18	19
Between 10 and 20 % (20% excluded)	19	0	19	8	11	16
20% and higher	6	0	6	2	4	6
Total number of countries	51	8	43	16	35	44

Source: UN-DESA, November (2008a).

Note: Excluding Seychelles and Swaziland due to lack of data.

Increased inflation rates in Africa have complicated macroeconomic management and contributed to a reversal in the achievements made over the last two decades in terms of poverty reduction. Tightening fiscal and monetary policies may harm the poor with no significant impact on inflation. In most African countries, monetary policy is focused on controlling money supply to reduce core (non-food) inflation. Due to weak financial markets, these countries lack effective indirect monetary tools. They are also characterized by relatively poor coordination between fiscal and monetary policies.

In countries where the financial markets are more sophisticated, governments have relied on interest rates and Treasury Bill rates as the main monetary policy instruments. For example, South Africa increased the repurchase (repo) rate by 50 basis points to 12 per cent in June 2008, raising the prime lending rate to 15.5 per cent. In Egypt, the overnight deposit and lending rates were also raised by 50 basis points to 11 and 13 per cent respectively in August 2008. High interest rates can have strong adverse effects on growth and, in turn, on government revenue.

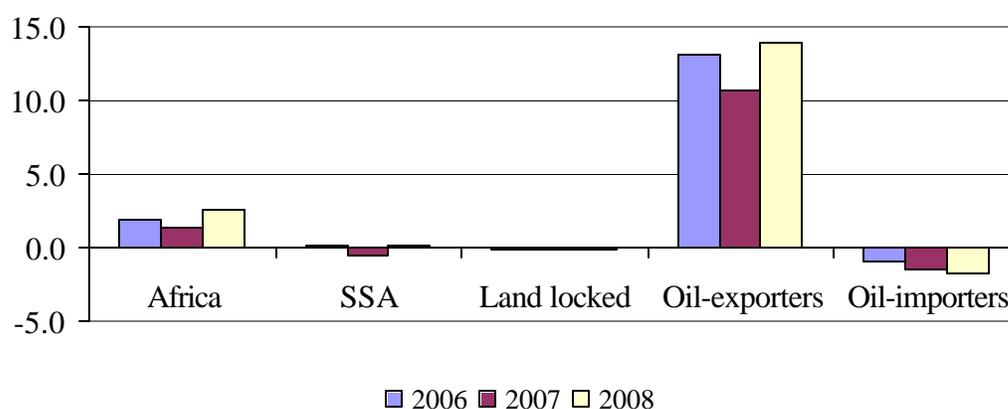
E. External Balances Worsened in Most African Countries in 2008

Developments in the balance of payments

Despite their downward trend since the second half of 2008, high energy and food prices have resulted in rising current account deficits in 31 oil-importing African countries with available data. On average, current account deficit in these countries increased from -1.5 per cent of GDP in 2007 to -1.8 per cent in 2008. Current account deficits have also increased, though slightly, in landlocked African economies that have received relatively high ODA flows in recent years. On the other hand, for oil-exporting countries, current account surpluses increased from 10.7 per cent in 2007 to 15.9 per cent in 2008, thanks to high oil prices in the first half of the year. Thus, the overall current account position of the 42 African countries with available data, which shows a surplus of 2.6 per cent in 2008, is a reflection of the high revenues generated by oil-exporting countries (figure 2).

The data clearly show mounting threats to current account sustainability in oil-importing African countries. This, together with internal imbalances and inflationary pressure, posed severe risks to macroeconomic stability and growth prospects in 2008 and beyond. In addition to rationalizing energy consumption, these countries should adopt strategies to diversify exports, promote tourism and attract remittances. In the short-term, however, oil-importing African economies need more aid inflows to manage their external balances effectively. Meanwhile, oil exporters should devote a sizable proportion of their export earnings and accumulated reserves to boost public investment in infrastructure, human capital development and public service delivery instead of low-return excess foreign currency reserves.

Figure 2: Current Account Balance in Africa by Category, 2006-2008 (% of GDP)



Source: UNECA calculations based on data from EIU, November 2008.

Note: Data cover only 42 African countries. The 11 excluded countries are: CAR, Comoros, DRC, Djibouti, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Sierra Leone, and Somalia.

Exchange rate volatility up in 2008

Based on nominal exchange rates, 18 of the 35 African currencies with available data appreciated against the US dollar in 2008, with 16 depreciating and one currency remaining unchanged. For the second consecutive year, the CFA, which is pegged to the Euro, appreciated substantially against the US dollar. In fact, many of the countries with strong primary commodity exports experienced currency appreciation in 2008. Overvalued exchange rates can discourage non-commodity exports from Africa, resulting in reduced international competitiveness or the “Dutch Disease” problem. However, many African currencies began to depreciate against the US dollar in late 2008.

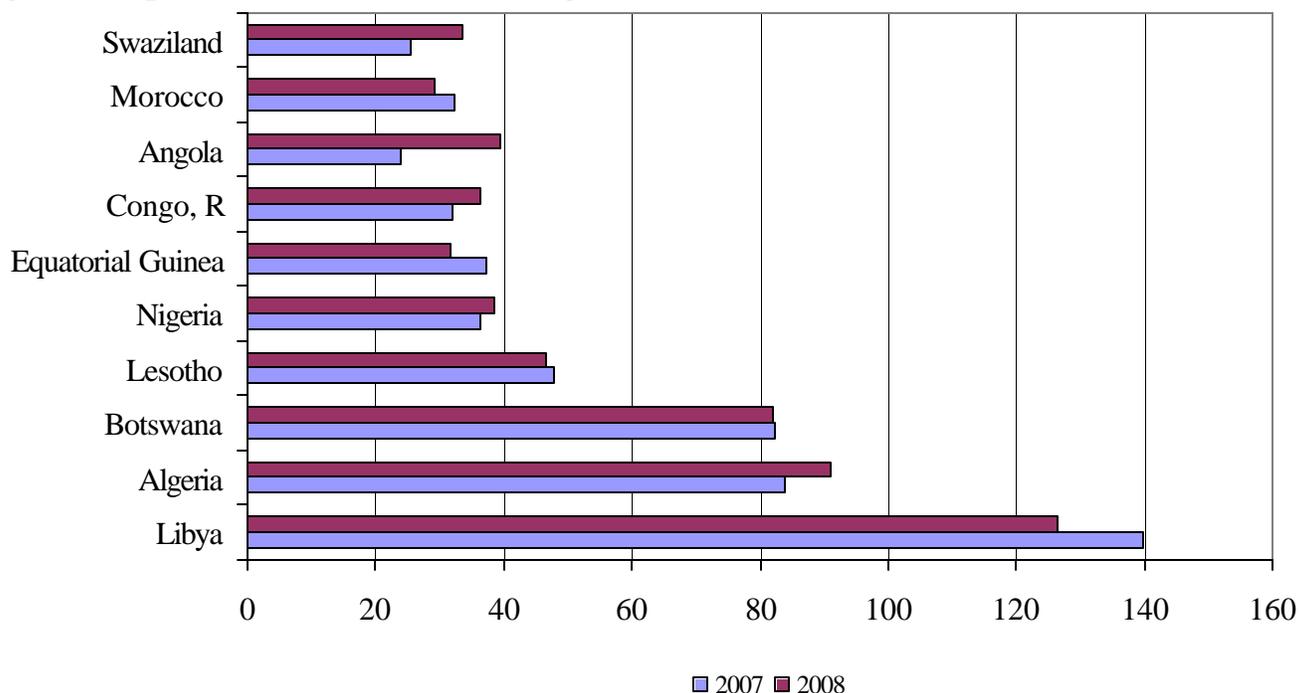
In terms of real effective exchange rate (REER), 28 of the 38 African countries with available data experienced currency appreciation in 2008. However, only six countries recorded REER appreciation of more than 10 per cent and three countries had REER depreciation of more than 10 per cent. Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique and

Zambia were the five African countries with the highest REER appreciation rates in 2008. Burundi, Ghana, Namibia, Seychelles and Zimbabwe were the five countries with the highest depreciation rates. This shows that both resource-rich and resource-poor countries can be confronted with large REER depreciation or appreciation, mainly as a result of fluctuations in the domestic price level.² High domestic prices as opposed to low prices cause the REER to appreciate, even if the nominal exchange rate is constant.

Owing to high current account surpluses in oil-exporting African countries, the continent's foreign exchange reserves continued to rise, from 32.6 per cent of GDP in 2007 to 34.5 per cent in 2008. Thirty-four of the 42 African countries with available data maintained foreign exchange reserves of 10 per cent of GDP or more in 2008. The list of the top 10 African countries in terms of foreign exchange reserves as a ratio of GDP indicates that high reserves originate mainly from commodity revenues and private capital flows and that none of these countries is a high aid-recipient country (figure 3).

Oil-exporting African economies need to coordinate fiscal and monetary policies closely to manage their foreign exchange reserves effectively and create a fiscal space for counter-cyclical interventions that can mitigate the impact of the global financial crisis and deepening economic downturn. This will also help them to manage risks emanating from disruptive exchange rate volatility and inflationary pressure while at the same time spurring domestic investment for fast and sustained growth.

² The REER index is defined as $[P_d/P_f \cdot \text{NER}]$, where P_d is the domestic price level, P_f is foreign (US) price level, NER is the official exchange rate expressed in terms of the domestic currency price of the US dollar (period average). Thus, REER represents the quantity of foreign goods that can be purchased with one unit of domestic goods.

Figure 3: Top 10 countries in terms of foreign reserve (% of GDP)

Source: EIU, November 2008.

Note: Excluding the following countries due to lack of data: CAR, Comoros, DRC, Djibouti, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Sierra Leone and Somalia.

Harnessing internal and external resources essential for Africa to boost growth

Africa's average gross domestic savings rate has increased from 21.8 per cent of GDP in 2004 to 26.3 in 2007. However, the domestic investment rate remained almost unchanged at around 22 per cent over the same period, far below the level required for achieving the MDGs. This partly reflects weaknesses in the domestic and regional financial markets and the inability, especially of resource-rich countries, to use commodity revenues to boost domestic investment. Owing to low income, both domestic savings and investment rates are lower in oil-importing African countries compared with oil-exporters.

Besides harnessing more domestic resources, Africa needs to mobilize increased non-debt generating external resources to boost domestic investment. As of July 2008, 19 African countries had received major reductions in official debt (United Nations 2008a). However, while Africa's official debt declined, the debt owed to banks and other private creditors rose considerably such that overall debt remained high. ODA to Africa remains below the level of \$72 billion per annum considered necessary for the continent to support the achievements of the MDGs (United Nations 2008a). Meanwhile, more needs to be done for the continent to improve aid quality and effectiveness and to enhance development through trade.

Honouring commitments to aid has become even more important in light of Africa's reduced access to private capital on account of the current global financial crisis. Development partners can signal their commitment to scale up aid to Africa by establishing rolling indicative timetables showing how they intend to reach their goals on aid quantity. This must be accompanied by measures to improve the delivery and management of aid. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness as well as the Accra Agenda for Action provide useful frameworks for improving aid effectiveness and these need to be fully implemented.

The rather ineffective use of trade for development is a reflection of domestic supply constraints, including poor infrastructure, a weak human capital base, and such external trade constraints as the stalemate of the Doha Round of trade negotiations, and the disputed agricultural subsidies by the EU, US, Japan and Canada. Besides raising public and private investment in infrastructure - at some \$52 billion annually - Africa needs substantial improvements in market access, as well as stronger regional market integration to enhance global competitiveness. Also in the face of the global financial turmoil and increasing uncertainties, African countries should continue to consolidate their recent economic reforms to create a business environment attractive to private capital inflows.

F. Trends in Social Development

Africa has continued to make considerable progress in a number of social development areas with some concrete gains in such areas as primary school enrolment, measles vaccination, the use of insecticide-treated bed nets, reductions in HIV prevalence rates in some countries and on some aspects of gender equality. However, very limited headway has been made on poverty, eradicating hunger, maternal mortality and on addressing disparities due to gender, income, and disability. This section examines the trends in social development in Africa based on the most recent data available, focusing on poverty and employment, education, and health with special attention to vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Poverty and unemployment

Data on income poverty in Africa is not complete, making close monitoring and tracking progress on poverty eradication at national and regional level a major challenge. According to recent estimates, the percentage of the population living in extreme poverty (using the new US\$1.25 per day international poverty line) in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has almost doubled, from 200 million in 1981 to 380 million in 2005 (Chen and Ravallion 2008). Meanwhile, SSA's unemployment rate declined only marginally, from 8.5 per cent in 1997 to 8 per cent in 2007 and is expected to rise sharply in 2009 as a result of the global economic recession. Unemployment rate is higher among disadvantaged groups, including women (9.1 per cent), youths (13.7 per cent), and people with disabilities (ILO, 2008). Also, unemployment is higher in North Africa (11.7 per cent in 1997 and 10.9 per

cent in 2007) than in SSA. Women and youths recorded higher unemployment rates in North Africa, at 16.2 per cent and 24.5 per cent respectively (ILO, 2008).

The share of people in vulnerable employment situation is high in SSA accounting for more than 70 per cent. The burden of vulnerable employment continues to fall heavily on women who remain mainly in the agriculture and informal sectors. Indeed, slow progress on social development is most pronounced for marginalized and vulnerable groups in African countries, including women, older persons, youth, persons with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children, internally displaced persons and indigenous people. The overall exclusion of these groups from society is reflected not only in their lower incomes and poorer outcomes in the labour market but also in terms of lower educational attainment rates, poor health status and under-representation in political processes and at policymaking levels.

The main challenges in fostering the social inclusion of vulnerable groups include lack of implementation of the commitments and policies; inadequate financial resources to support spending on social programmes; technical capacity constraints; lack of relevant data to support policies; and war and conflicts. The need for the social inclusion of the vulnerable and marginalized groups and to strengthen social protection systems has been magnified by the recent food and energy crises and the global economic recession.

Education: remarkable increases in primary school enrolment rates

The average net primary enrolment rate in SSA increased from 56 per cent in 1999 to 71 per cent in 2006. In North Africa the initial enrolment figures were above 85 per cent in 1991, except for Morocco that started from 56 per cent in 1991 and reached 86 per cent in 2003 and no change has been registered since. The improvements in primary enrolment rates are driven largely by a combination of strong government commitment that has expanded primary education facilities, eliminated school fees, and appropriate support from the donor community (United Nations, 2008a). Progress has been especially remarkable in the following countries: United Republic of Tanzania, Ethiopia, the Niger, Benin, Guinea and Madagascar, where educational coverage rose by more than 50 per cent since 1999 (UNESCO, 2009). If the current rates are sustained, many countries in Africa will be able to achieve the enrolment figures of 100 per cent by 2015.

Although the primary enrolment rate has been improving, the primary completion rate is an area of concern. Between 1999 and 2006, the completion rate improved from 49 per cent to 60 per cent in SSA, and from 86 per cent to 92 per cent in North Africa. The completion rates for girls in SSA are much lower than for boys. The major reasons for dropping out of school include lack of resources to meet the costs, domestic care activities within households (particularly for girls), early marriages, child labour, teenage pregnancies, poor quality of education and long distance to school. It is important to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalised children are enrolled and remain in school through targeted programmes and interventions aimed at poor households and at girls. Pupil to teacher ratio needs to be further improved from 45 in 2006.

The gross enrolment ratio (GER) in secondary education in SSA increased from only 25 per cent in 1999 to 32 per cent in 2006. The tertiary gross enrolment ratio in SSA has remained at around 5 per cent in 2006 compared to 17 per cent for developing countries and 25 per cent for the world. North Africa has made significant progress in increasing enrolment in secondary and tertiary education. The major challenges affecting secondary and tertiary education include shortage of trained teachers, and lack of resources to cover the cost of education.

The youth literacy rate improved from 68 per cent in 1995 to 86 per cent in 2007 in North Africa. In SSA, the literacy rate improved from 53 per cent to 62 per cent for adults and from 64 per cent to 72 per cent for youths aged 15 to 24 over the same period (UNESCO, 2009). However, it is important to note that large disparities in literacy rates are evident in many countries in relation to gender, poverty, place of residence, ethnicity, language and disability (UNESCO, 2009).

In 2006, the ratio of girls to boys' gross enrolment in primary education reached 0.89 in SSA, and 0.93 in North Africa, thanks to efforts by governments and donors (United Nations, 2008a). North Africa has achieved the strongest gains with young female literacy rates increasing by over 20 percentage points from the 1980s to 2007, followed by southern Africa, East Africa, West Africa and central Africa, which recorded the lowest gains (ECA, 2007). The literacy rate for young women in SSA increased from 58.6 per cent for the period 1985-1994 to 67.3 per cent in 2007. Yet, the gap between the female and male literacy rates is not decreasing fast enough, especially in SSA, where the ratio of young female to male literacy rate has remained rather static over the last decade, at around 0.87 per cent.

Gender parity has deteriorated at the secondary level in SSA where the gross enrolment ratio of girls to boys in secondary education decreased from 0.82 in 2000 to 0.80 in 2006 (United Nations, 2008b). The gross enrolment ratio in secondary education for girls reached only 28 per cent. Far fewer African countries are making progress in achieving gender parity in tertiary education. The ratio of female to male tertiary enrolment ratios only reached 0.68 in SSA. In comparison, North Africa has achieved gender parity in enrolment in tertiary education (United Nations, 2008b).

Health: mixed progress in combating HIV/AIDS and other epidemics and reducing infant, child and maternal mortality rates

Through extensive and targeted prevention programmes, HIV prevalence rate has either stabilized or declined in most African countries (UNAIDS, 2008). The adult HIV prevalence rate in SSA has declined from 5.8 per cent in 2001 to 5.0 per cent in 2007. The adult prevalence rate is lowest in North Africa (less than 1 per cent) and highest in Southern Africa where in 2007 it exceeded 15 per cent in seven countries. HIV/AIDS remains the leading cause of adult morbidity and mortality on the continent. However, in many countries of the region there are positive signs of behaviour change that suggest a

stabilization of the epidemic, especially among young people (15-24). The adoption of a safer behaviour has resulted in a decrease in the number of new infections in Rwanda and Zimbabwe. This shift in behaviour is especially encouraging since young people have delayed the onset of sexual activity in seven of the most affected countries (Burkina-Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Uganda and Zambia) (United Nations, 2008a).

Due to declining prices of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs), out of 4.6 million Africans living with the virus and requiring ARVs, nearly a third are undergoing treatment. The number of people who received antiretroviral treatment in Central, East, South and West Africa, as a whole, increased from 100,000 in 2003 to 2.1 million in 2007 (UNAIDS, 2008). The corresponding coverage of people who received treatment improved from 2 per cent in 2003 to 28 per cent in 2006. Four countries (Botswana, Namibia, Rwanda and Senegal) have already achieved the goal of treating at least 50 per cent of patients (UNAIDS, 2008). In 2007, over 470,000 HIV positive pregnant women were reported to have received ARVs for prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT), an increase of over 50 per cent from 2006. While the overall HIV unmet treatment gap is still high, more attention should be given to women who constituted 57 per cent of infected people in SSA in 2003 and 61 per cent in 2007 (UNAIDS, 2008).

Overall trends in tuberculosis (TB) incidence, prevalence and deaths have been on the increase in SSA as opposed to North Africa. By the end of 2006, 10 countries (the Comoros, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Ghana, Mali, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe and Seychelles) had already halted and started to reverse overall and smear positive TB incidence as specified in the core MDG targets (WHO, 2008). In 2006, TB incidence, prevalence and death rates in SSA were 291, 521 and 59 per 100,000 people (excluding HIV-infected), respectively. The respective rates for North Africa were 44 for each of TB incidence and prevalence and 4 for deaths.

Malaria is still the leading cause of child mortality in Africa and of anaemia in pregnant women. Although data on malaria incidence and death rates is not comprehensive, coverage of key malaria control interventions has increased in several countries due to availability of funding and increased national attention to malaria control. Two-thirds of African countries have adopted policies that include the use of effective anti-malaria drugs. Since 2007, 25 countries are implementing an artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT) treatment policy with 20 of them implementing a countrywide policy change from chloroquine (AUC and WHO, 2008). The use of insecticide treated bed nets by children under age five in malaria risk areas in SSA is reported to have improved from 2.1 in 2001 to 5 per cent in 2005 and 8 per cent in 2007 (United Nations, 2008a).

Preventable diseases and malnutrition are still the leading causes of the high infant and under-five mortality rates. However, the continent has witnessed a decline in both infant and under-five mortality rates. Between 1990 and 2007, the respective infant and under-five mortality rates declined from 111 and 187 per 1,000 live births to 89 and 148 for SSA and from 58 and 79 to 36 and 46 for North Africa. West and Central Africa recorded the highest mortality rates and lowest average rate of decline (1.2 per cent)

compared to Eastern and Southern Africa (1.7 per cent) and North Africa (3.2 per cent). There is also wide variation within countries with higher mortality rates recorded for rural and poor families.

Similarly, maternal mortality has been considerably reduced in North Africa, from 250 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 160 in 2005. But, maternal mortality remains unacceptably high in the rest of the continent. In 2005, the MMR was 760 (down from 790 in 1990) in Eastern and Southern Africa, and 1,100 (the same as in 1990) in West and Central Africa (WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and World Bank, 2007). Also, the lifetime risk of maternal death is unacceptably high in SSA, at 1 in 23 compared to only 1 in 140 in North Africa, 1 in 92 in the World and 1 in 8,000 in industrialized countries. Obviously, progress in reducing maternal mortality in SSA has been negligible although there are significant disparities across countries, emanating from differences in income and other factors.

One of the key factors contributing to high maternal mortality in Africa is the high rate of adolescent pregnancies due to early marriage and teenage pregnancies. The risk of maternal mortality for very young mothers (15-19) is twice as high as that for mothers aged above 20. UNICEF (2008) estimates that 70,000 very young mothers (15-19) die every year from pregnancy-related complications. About 80 per cent of maternal deaths are preventable if women have access to essential maternity and basic health care services. Efforts to expand coverage of essential services and strengthening of the health systems should be combined with actions to educate and empower women.

G. Growth Prospects for 2009 Darken as Global Recession Deepens

Africa's growth prospects for 2009 have been constantly revised downwards. In early 2009, real GDP growth rate in Africa was expected to fall to 2.0 per cent in 2009 from 5.1 per cent in 2008. Subregional growth rates in 2009 were projected to range from -1.2 per cent in Southern Africa to 1.9 per cent in Central Africa, 3.1 per cent in North Africa, 3.1 per cent in West Africa and 3.8 per cent in East Africa. However, the continent's growth prospects for 2009 are subject to strong uncertainties stemming mainly from the world financial crisis and the deepening global recession.

The chances for growth rebound in Africa in 2009 are slim, and hinge on the ability of economic stimulus packages in developed countries to enhance not only domestic demand but also demand for commodity exports from Africa. Nevertheless, sustained economic reforms, easing inflation, domestic currency depreciation and efforts to revive domestic demand would contribute to a positive, albeit weaker growth performance in Africa in 2009. Average inflation in Africa is expected to ease in 2009, as oil and food prices decline.

Lower energy and food prices in 2009 should reduce the pressure on government budgets. This will support government efforts to consolidate effective macroeconomic management and institutional reforms, which should further stimulate private investment

and growth on the continent. In line with global financial trends, governments are expected to maintain or lower interest rates to encourage bank lending to the private sector. They are also expected to allow exchange rates to adjust to stabilize the external sector and promote international competitiveness. In fact, most African currencies are expected to depreciate in 2009, as a result of the recession and slowing export earnings and capital inflows.

As external capital inflows are likely to decline in 2009 because of the difficult economic conditions in major donor countries, African countries should use all available ODA inflows to boost domestic demand. Improving political and economic governance and the security situation are additional factors that can help Africa to avoid a severe slowdown. However, while the political situation is improving in countries such as Kenya and the Comoros, the continent faces persistent conflicts in countries such as DRC and CAR.

The political and governance environment also remains tenuous in countries such as Chad, the Sudan and Zimbabwe. The recent food crisis and looming starvation are threats to political and social stability, especially in East and West Africa and in conflict countries. Rising poverty rates also compound the effect of epidemics such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, hampering economic and social progress on the continent. Finally, due to the limited diversification of production structures and high dependence on rain-fed agriculture, Africa also remains vulnerable to weather shocks and climate change. Some countries in the Horn of Africa were still experiencing severe drought conditions and food shortages in early 2009.

H. Conclusions and Key Policy Issues

Economic performance in Africa continues to depend heavily on global commodity demand and prices due to limited transformation of production structures. However, the GDP growth rate remained relatively high at 5.1 per cent in 2008. The global economic downturn and recession will have substantial effects on Africa through reduced capital inflows and lower demand and prices for primary commodity exports. Thus, Africa's GDP growth is projected to fall sharply in 2009. Meanwhile, as in previous years, economic performance varied considerably across countries and subregions and remains insufficient for achieving the MDGs.

In 2008, high oil prices translated into high GDP growth rates as well as favourable internal and external balances in oil-exporting African countries. However, the continent recorded high inflation rates in 2008 that have resulted in declining standards of living especially in SSA.

Although food prices are on the decline, they are likely to stay high in the medium term. At the same time, many African countries continue to suffer from food shortages and food insecurity due to drought, conflicts, and rigid supply conditions among other factors. In addition to strengthening emergency measures, long-term responses are essential for Africa to meet the challenges of the food and financial crises, growth volatility and slow

social development. In the short run, governments need greater policy flexibility as well as external support to combat food shortages through, for example, lower tariffs on food imports, subsidies and cash transfers to poor households. In the long-run, governments should invest more in agriculture and infrastructure - the main constraints on growth - especially energy, communication, roads and public service delivery in the areas of education and health. This, together with effective macroeconomic management and institutional reforms will stimulate private sector development and investment, accelerating job creation and poverty reduction.

In this context, resource-rich African countries need to use commodity revenue and accumulated reserves from the commodity boom to enhance diversification of production structures and international competitiveness. This requires increased productivity-enhancing public investment, especially in infrastructure, technology and human capital development.

African governments and development partners need to sustain and strengthen efforts to mobilize more resources from domestic and external non-debt generating sources to increase emergency aid and debt relief as well as concessional lending to finance short-term strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of the global crisis. In addition to efforts to sustain ODA flows, increased debt relief and lending by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) remain essential for low-income countries. IFIs including the IMF, World Bank and regional development banks are urged to design special stabilization and development funds such as the "Vulnerability Fund" recently proposed by the President of the World Bank, the Emergency Liquidity Facility (ELF) and the Trade Financing Initiative (TFI) proposed by the African Development Bank.

Beyond emergency and stabilization objectives, special funds and lending facilities should aim at promoting productive capacity and economic growth in low-income countries to address long-term growth challenges. In this regard, the threats posed by the recent crisis and deepening global recession also call for speedy and successful conclusion of the Doha Round of Negotiations and the need to avoid protectionist tendencies in recovery plans being implemented by the rich countries.

Africa's development strategies should continue to focus on social development with special attention to vulnerable groups. Policy targeting should include combating poverty and hunger, creating decent work opportunities, improving access to education and health-care services, promoting gender equality, ensuring the social inclusion of the vulnerable groups, designing effective redistribution policies and strengthening social protection systems. These issues are at the core of the social policy framework for Africa and the Windhoek declaration on social development, which were adopted at the conclusion of the first African Union conference of African ministers in charge of social development in October 2008.

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