

Policy brief

Prospects for the successful implementation of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union – lessons learned from efforts to align national development plans.



Acknowledgments

This policy brief was prepared under the overall guidance of the Director of the Macroeconomic and Governance Division of the Economic Commission for Africa, Adam Elhiraika, and under the direct supervision of and with substantive input by the Chief of the Development Planning Section of the Macroeconomic and Governance Division, Bartholomew Armah. Technical input was provided by Freida M’Cormack, Oyebanke Abejirin and Citra Kumala. The brief draws on the ECA Emerging Issues in Development Planning Series paper ‘Strengthening capacities for integrated development planning, financing and reporting: lessons and challenges’, as well as the review by the African Union Technical Working Group on Agenda 2063 of the first 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, and the Working Group’s preparation of the second 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063.

1. Introduction

In the past two decades, countries have been called upon to make a number of regional and global commitments aimed at eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development. Notable among those commitments are the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. Agenda 2063, adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in January 2015, is a shared framework for inclusive growth and sustainable development for Africa. Spanning a 50-year period, Agenda 2063 sets out 7 aspirations,¹ 20 goals and 39 priority areas and associated targets, and is to be implemented through a series of 10-year implementation plans. The first of those implementation plans covers the period from 2014 to 2023. The process to develop the second 10-year implementation plan began in 2023.

The present policy brief contains a review of the progress achieved within the context of the first 10-year implementation plan and lessons learned that can inform the process of developing the second 10-year plan. In section 2, a number of challenges encountered during the implementation of the first 10-year implementation plan are highlighted, based on an evaluation conducted by the African Union Commission and the experience of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in supporting the development planning processes of its members. In section 3, a number of lessons learned in that context are highlighted, while section 4 contains several policy recommendations to inform implementation of the second 10-year implementation plan.

2. Challenges encountered and opportunities stemming from implementation of the first 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063

2.1. Evaluation by the African Union Commission

In advance of the development of the second 10-year implementation plan, the Executive Council of the African Union called on the African Union Commission and the African Union Development Agency to evaluate progress achieved in the context of the first 10-year plan. The evaluation, undertaken with development partners, including the African Union Technical Working Group on Agenda 2063, of which ECA is a part, considered the level of achievement of the national, subregional and continental targets set out in the plan, the implementation support provided by relevant African Union entities and agencies and the regional economic commissions in coordinating action, managing partnerships and mobilizing resources, and progress in the implementation of flagship projects of Agenda 2063 (African Union Commission, 2023a, forthcoming).

The evaluation, which incorporated country self-assessments, country visits, key informant interviews, desk reviews and an online survey, revealed that progress towards the

¹ The seven aspirations are: a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development; an integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals 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 peaceful and secure Africa; an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics; an Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children; and Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner. The aspirations and their associated goals are set out at: au.int/en/agenda2063/aspirations.

achievement of the targets of the first 10-year plan had been moderately good: the continent had exceeded targets for 10 indicators; was at between 51 per cent and 100 per cent on some 30 indicators; had made limited progress (between 1 and 50 per cent) on 16 indicators; and was regressing on 13 indicators. Awareness of Agenda 2063 was found to be lacking at the national and subnational levels, despite the high level of ownership by States. Furthermore, although there was a high level of convergence between Agenda 2063 on the one hand and regional, continental and global development frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda, on the other, alignment between the first 10-year implementation plan and national development plans was often weak, while implementation of Agenda 2063 remained a low priority in many States. Lack of capacity to drive implementation also hindered progress.

The evaluation also revealed that inadequate resources had been made available to drive forward the first 10-year implementation plan, including at the national level. Furthermore disproportionate financial resources had been allocated to aspiration 4, on peace and security, with those resources used, primarily, to develop relevant regional architecture, while insufficient resources had been earmarked for implementation at the national level.

2.2. Challenges observed during the provision of support by the Economic Commission for Africa to its members

While the evaluation by the African Union Commission revealed that there was limited awareness of Agenda 2063 at the national level and that the goals set out in the national development plans of African countries were not always in alignment with the first 10-year implementation plan, ECA has observed that some countries have made efforts to assess the alignment of their national development plans with Agenda 2063. In that connection, some States have made use of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, a web application developed by ECA in response to the needs of African countries, to help them simultaneously integrate the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 into their national development plans, align those plans with financing frameworks and report their progress in a harmonized way.² The toolkit has been rolled out in 30 members of ECA and in one regional economic community. In 2023, ECA undertook a comprehensive review of the impact of the support it provides to its members. The findings of that review support and build on the findings of the evaluation conducted by the African Union Commission.

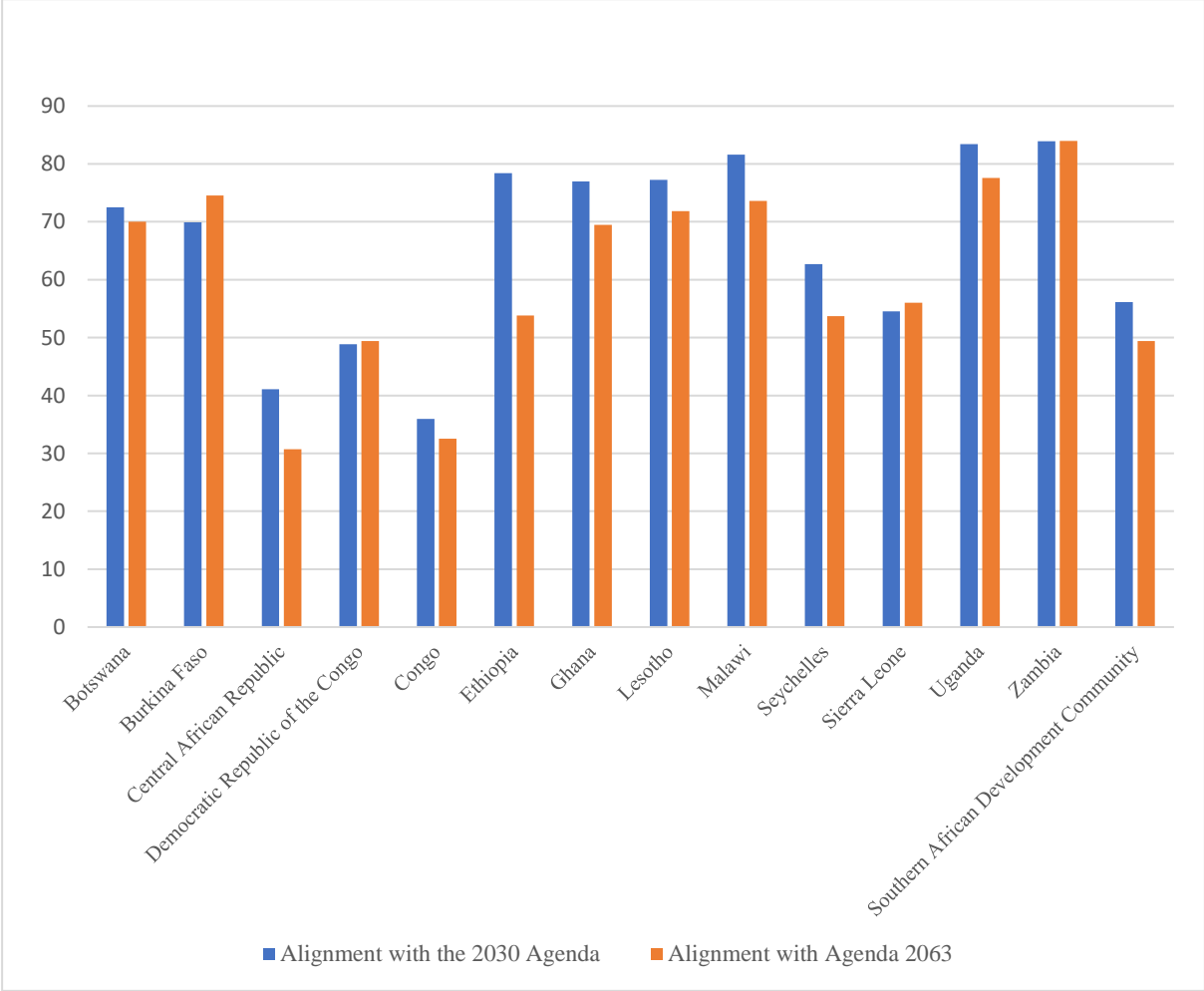
2.2.1. Closer alignment of national plans with the 2030 Agenda than with Agenda 2063

Consistent with the findings of the African Union Commission, analysis by ECA reveals that African States have tended to design national development plans that are more closely aligned with the 2030 Agenda than with Agenda 2063. Among the 13 countries and one regional economic community analysed, all except for Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Zambia have adopted development plans that are more closely aligned with Agenda 2030 than with Agenda 2063. Those findings are illustrated in figure I. The weaker alignment of national development plans with the aspirations, goals and targets of

² The integrated planning and reporting toolkit facilitates alignment in four areas, namely goals, targets, indicators and aggregate alignment. Specifically, the toolkit supports countries in their efforts to align their development plans and policies with the 17 goals, 169 targets and 244 indicators set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 20 goals, 174 targets and 257 indicators of Agenda 2063, as articulated in the first 10-year implementation plan. The toolkit assigns different weights to goals (50 per cent), targets (30 per cent), and indicators (20 per cent), with overall alignment based on the weighted sum of those scores. Alignment is measured as fully aligned, partially/weakly aligned, or not aligned. Where the data necessary to compute alignment scores are unavailable, the alignment is categorized as not processed.

Agenda 2063 may be due to the low levels of awareness and ownership of the Agenda 2063 process in most countries, which was confirmed by the results of the African Union Commission evaluation of the first 10-year implementation plan, in particular at the sectoral and local government levels.

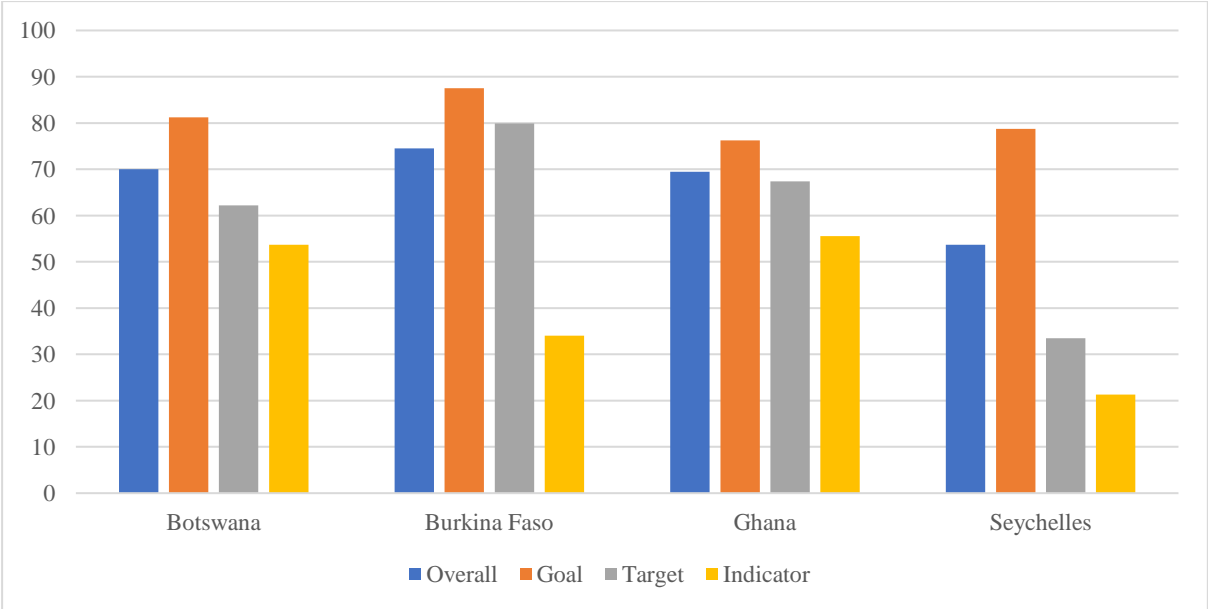
Figure I
Alignment of national development plans with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, selected countries in Africa, and the Southern African Development Community
 (Percentage)



Source: ECA, 2023.

Furthermore, ECA has found that, for both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, alignment with national development plans tends to be strongest at the level of goals, weaker at the target level and weakest at the indicator level. This is in line with the findings of the African Union Commission evaluation.

Figure II
Overall alignment of national development plans with Agenda 2063 and alignment at the goal, target and indicator levels, selected countries in Africa
 (Percentage)



Source: ECA, 2023.

2.2.2. Focus on regional rather than national aspirations

While it was envisaged that the first 10-year implementation plan would support the inclusion of the goals of Agenda 2063 in plans at the national level and national-level implementation, several goals of Agenda 2063 are continental in nature and prescribe few country-specific targets and indicators. Goal 8: United Africa (federal or confederate), for example, pertains to a framework and institutions for a United Africa, while goal 9: Continental financial and monetary institutions are established and functional, is not a country-specific goal and does not prescribe country-specific targets and indicators. Furthermore, goals 14 and 15, which relate to a peaceful and secure Africa, prescribe targets related to the creation of African Union-level instruments on peace and security, including fully operational and functional African peace and security architecture pillars. In that connection, the African Union Commission evaluation of the first 10-year implementation plan revealed that, although most resources earmarked for Agenda 2063 were used to further the achievement of the goals pertaining to peace and security, the resources were almost entirely spent at the continental and regional levels, with limited resources provided for adaptation of those goals to the local or national context.

2.2.3. Wide disparities in alignment across the goals

The strength of alignment also varies across goals that are applicable to all countries. Alignment is strongest for goals that relate to sectors that countries tend to address within the context of their national development plans. Those goals include: goal 2: Well educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by science, technology and innovation (fully aligned in 10 of the 13 countries reviewed); goal 1: A high standard of living and well-being for all citizens (fully aligned in 9 countries); goal 5: Modern agriculture for increased productivity and production (fully aligned in 8 countries); and goal 3: Healthy and well-nourished citizens (fully aligned in 8 countries).

The weakest alignments were with regard to: goal 9: Continental financial and monetary institutions are established and functional (seven countries not aligned); goal 16: African cultural renaissance is pre-eminent (four countries not aligned); and goal 6: Blue/ocean economy for accelerated economic growth (four countries not aligned). In general, those goals relate to relatively recent sustainable development concerns, to issues that were not traditionally considered important to development, such as cultural activities, and to institution-building.

2.2.4. Challenges related to the design of national development plans

Beyond the issue of alignment, national development plans are only as good as a country's ability to execute them effectively. ECA has observed that, even when plans are well aligned with Agenda 2063, additional challenges may arise as a result of limitations in the national development plans themselves, including information gaps in national development plan results frameworks.³ For example, no baselines are specified for certain indicators in many national development plans, while targets are not always specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART), which undermines the effectiveness of the plans.

In addition, many members of ECA have only weak institutional mechanisms for tracking plan implementation. Indeed, while a country might develop a well-crafted national development plan with SMART targets and indicators, it may lack effective mechanisms for monitoring progress, or indeed the capacity to gather the required data. Targets and indicators may sometimes be established without effective mechanisms for generating, organizing, storing and disseminating data pertaining to those targets and indicators in a timely manner.

2.2.5. Disconnect between financial programming and planning processes

National development plans are not always aligned with national financing frameworks or budgets, either in terms of their planning cycles or in terms of budgetary allocations. Indeed, it has been observed that national budget finance programmes are often out of step with the programme priorities of national development plans, potentially causing critical gaps in implementation. To address that challenge, ECA has developed a financing module for the integrated planning and reporting toolkit to assist its members in aligning their budgets with their development priorities.

3. Lessons learned from the first 10-year implementation plan

3.1. Evaluation by the African Union Commission

Through its evaluation, the African Union Commission identified the need for a theory of change that clearly articulated how results were to be achieved and provided guidance on catalytic strategies for achieving change. The African Union also concluded that the support of its entities and regional economic communities was needed in order to implement, monitor, evaluate, report on and mainstream relevant continental strategies into national development plans and drive forward the desired change. Improvements to data availability were also needed. For example, although 39 priority areas were identified in the first 10-year implementation plan, only 29 could be tracked for performance over the decade. Progress also

³ Based on observations made during integrated planning and reporting toolkit training, post-training evaluations, and a survey on implementation of the toolkit conducted by ECA in 2023. Further details of that process are available in ECA (2023).

needed to be tracked more systematically, for instance by using a “compelling scoreboard”, which would enable all stakeholders to know whether they were making progress, and to take collective action to course correct if necessary. It was also important to estimate the cost of Agenda 2063 implementation plans, especially as 76 per cent of the budget of the African Union spent on Agenda 2063 between 2014 and 2021 had been spent on just one aspiration, namely aspiration 4 on peace and security.⁴

3.2. Lessons learned through the provision of support by the Economic Commission for Africa to its members

ECA has also learned a number of lessons through its provision of support to its members to facilitate their implementation of Agenda 2063. Some African States find it challenging to integrate global and regional agendas and strategies into their national development plans and some may require support when designing those plans to ensure that they reflect the targets and indicators of Agenda 2063. Support by ECA and development partners could include the development of global and regional guidelines to promote a harmonized approach to aligning national development plans with the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and other agendas and programmes, such as the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. This is a challenging task owing to the differences in structure between plans and agendas.

To address data challenges, countries should make efforts to establish a centralized mechanism to coordinate and harmonize data collection and entry in order to mitigate the effects of limited monitoring and evaluation capabilities of countries, which can hamper the effective implementation of their national development plans.

4. Policy recommendations and the way forward

ECA engagement with its members has shown that there is greater awareness of and alignment with the 2030 Agenda than with Agenda 2063, with countries tending to prioritize the former, even though they also have reporting obligations under the latter. If African countries are truly committed to the implementation of Agenda 2063, further efforts to raise awareness of that Agenda are needed at various levels of government. Not only the goals of Agenda 2063, but also its targets and indicators need to be effectively promoted and communicated, including among political decision makers, technical entities responsible for implementation and other stakeholders, including in civil society and the private sector, in order to strengthen accountability and leveraging. The ongoing design of the second 10-year implementation plan provides a unique opportunity for awareness-raising efforts in that regard.

Both the United Nations and the African Union have emphasized the complementarity of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Enhancing the alignment of the two agendas, in particular at the indicator level, in the second 10-year implementation plan and promoting robust awareness-raising efforts would increase knowledge of those indicators. Development partners must also take concrete steps to support the alignment of national development plans with Agenda 2063, including by:

(a) Helping States to align their national development plans with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 during the development plan design stage;

⁴ For further information, see African Union Commission (2023b, forthcoming).

(b) Supporting the design of robust results frameworks that are aligned with 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 indicators and targets, while ensuring that national development plan targets are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART), in line with the capacities of national data systems;

(c) Enhancing the access of countries to relevant data, including administrative data, and building their capacities in results-based management, monitoring and evaluation, with particular emphasis placed on building capacity in data collection and statistics, as effective monitoring and evaluation will facilitate efforts by planners to assess whether established targets are being achieved and whether strategic adjustments need to be made;

(d) Assisting countries in their efforts to align their planning and financial programmes with national development priorities, given the critical importance of integrated national financing frameworks, with a view to ensuring that national budget allocations are prioritized in national development plans to finance Agenda 2063 deliverables. This is particularly important because, in the absence of explicit financial commitments, national development plans, and by extension Agenda 2063, are likely to remain inadequately funded, undermining implementation;

(e) Promoting the use of digital technologies and tools that can facilitate planning, such as the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, developed by ECA in order to help countries and other relevant stakeholders to evaluate alignment at the goal, target and indicator levels, and reduce the reporting burden associated with the increasing number of global and continental agendas.

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