

Developing Capacity for Africa's Economic and Social Transformation

Report from the 25th ACBF Anniversary Conference in Harare, Zimbabwe

The African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) held its 25th anniversary conference in Harare, Zimbabwe, 3-5 May 2016. The theme of the conference was "*Developing Capacity for Africa's Economic and Social Transformation*". The celebrations coincided with the 3rd Pan-African Capacity Development Forum (CDF3) and kicked off with vigorous debates centered around the issues of capacity gaps for Africa's Economic and Social Transformation and the institutional imperatives that are needed to address these gaps. With Agenda 2063 very much in focus, the key message highlighted on Day 1 was the continent's need for capacity building. In the Words of the ACBF's Executive Secretary, Prof Emmanuel Nnadozie, "*Capacity remains the missing link in achieving the development agendas in Africa.*" He noted that Africa continues to face a myriad of problems, among them youth unemployment, poverty, low industrialization,

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declining commodity prices, and poor infrastructure development. This begs the question, why? The answer, according to him, lies in "the central issue" of "the lack of capacity" on the continent. This has been proven by various studies, including those by the ACBF itself. "Therefore capacity deficiencies remain a binding constraint to Africa's economic and social transformation," he asserted. Prof Nnadozie insisted that Africa still needed to develop the capacity to successfully design, implement, and monitor its policy measures and reforms. More than economic growth, the continent needs to transform its economies sufficiently enough to create wealth and jobs, reduce poverty, minimize inequalities, strengthen productive capacities, enhance social

conditions, and achieve sustainable development.

Interestingly, this is the whole idea underpinning the AU's Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It is important to note and remember that it is only through economic and social transformation that Africa will ensure optimal use of its natural resources, promote industrial development, and develop resilience to commodity price shocks.

Regarding the skills needed to implement the first 10 years of the African Union's Agenda 2063, the following are needed, but currently lacking:

- In terms of agriculture scientists and researchers, Africa has a current projected gap of 1.6m and a projected 1.8m to aim for by 2023.
- Africa has an estimated gap of 2.8m water and sanitation engineers. Currently, Africa has a projected gap

Reports

of 4.3m engineers, while it should be aiming for 8.3m by 2023.

- While it imports over \$60 billion of food per year, Africa has 55 per cent of its arable land lying fallow. And only 5 per cent of the land is irrigated
- Africa has 13 tractors for every 100 hectares of arable land; the global average is 200.

Mr Willard Manungo, the permanent secretary in Zimbabwe's Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, in his opening remarks praised the ACBF for the work it has done across Africa in the past 25 years, testifying that Zimbabwe was a key beneficiary of the ACBF's half-century work. He noted that "the esteemed gathering of diverse minds offered ample opportunity for us as a continent to introspect different ways and means of strengthening capacity development for the advancement of the continent."

The Opening keynote address was delivered by Anthony Mothae Maruping, Commissioner, Economic Affairs; African Union Commission. He noted that African stakeholders and leadership started developing transformative strategies in 2011/12 when formulation of Common African Position on Post 2015 Development Agenda (CAP) commenced and in 2013 when 50 years of achievement by the OAU/AU was celebrated and the decision to develop a vision and strategic framework for the next 50 was taken. Africa has thus been ahead of the curve in this regard. This was well before another wave of commodities prices collapse. Besides, he underscored the fact that a number of African countries are already transforming their economies having domesticated Agenda 2063 (A2063) and SDGs with either technical support or on their own. Domestication involves assimilation or infusion of the relevant contents of A2063 and SDGs into the national strategic action plans. The same is being done at Regional Economic Community (RECs) level. In addition domestication exercise involves popularization and consolidation of ownership of A2063 by the stakeholders in the public, private sector and civil society domains.

Noting that Agenda 2063 is likely to have more impact in Africa's development compared to previous blueprints, Maruping noted the remarkable compatibility between the Agenda 2063 and the UN's SDGs. He said that reporting channels have been established at two levels to

track progress both of the Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. (1) On the African Union side the technical team will report to the AU Co-ordination Meeting of CEOs. That forum will report to the AU A2063 Ministerial Follow up Committee. That in turn will report to the AU Executive Council and then to the AU Summit. This has been in operation in the last two years. (2) On the global side the technical team will report to CEOs (co-ordination meeting); then to a platform that is in the process of being formed in the form of "Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development". That will report to the UN ECOSOC and UN DESA High Level Political Panel and then to the UN General Assembly. On this basis, he asserted that there is a much higher chance of Agenda 2063 being more of a success than previous frameworks. The process has been meticulously executed every step of the way. No stone has been left unturned. Every necessary corrective measure to avoid repeat of slip-pages of the past has been amply addressed.

An accelerated, inclusive, and transformative real growth with equity is no longer an option but an imperative for Africa so that the continent can, in a significant way, create jobs, tackle poverty and gain rapid, resilient and sustainable socio-economic development. All relevant stakeholders are agreed that this should be the way forward. Maruping said Africa should not allow itself to be "pacified" by the sweet talk of the continent having achieved high economic growth rates in recent years because Africa's population has been growing in equal volume, if not higher. In effect, there is a cancelling out going on, or in other words Africa needs high growth rates to satisfy the demands of its ever-growing population. Moreover, the said growth rate figures, according to Dr Maruping, are just a "mathematical fluke" as they are often associated with post-conflict countries that are starting again from zero. "Let's regard this growth rate talk with caution and not be pacified by it and relax," Dr Maruping urged the continent.

He, however, conceded that the capacity building challenges to be surmounted by Africa in order to achieve the goals of the AU Agenda 2063 are enormous. He praised the "sterling work" done by the ACBF in the past 25 years, saying it is Africa's premier institution to address these challenges. "Therefore, the ACBF should be enabled and supported by all stakeholders to adequately carry out its mandate," Dr Maruping pleaded.

A participant, Mrs Monique Kande, from Congo, noted that Africa needs to direct investments towards production in order to mobilize internal financing to improve production. "It is common cause that in most of Africa, the productive capacity of women is very limited" she said. She bemoaned the fact that women "work the fields using hoes, but when mechanization comes in the form of tractors, it is not women who receive the tractors; the women continue to receive hoes. The tractors are given to politicians and they rot behind their houses."

Contributing to the same debate, Mr Emmanuel Ndlangamandhla, the executive director of the Coordinating Assembly of NGOs in Swaziland, said civil society organizations (CSOs) had expanded in scope, size and capacity as Africa continued to experience economic and social transformation. According to him, CSOs "are playing a key role in serving as the voice of the citizens of Africa, while also acting as service delivery agents to complement governments' efforts, especially in hard to reach areas."

In the plenary session that preceded the debate, many questions were raised: For example, how does Africa build citizens' capacities? And which capacities are necessary? If Africans don't have the skills in negotiation, how can they benefit meaningfully from global trade? How do we situate the fact that a high percentage of food consumed in Africa is produced in Asia?

Responding to some of the questions, the Swedish Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Lars Ronnas, said governments had a duty to protect citizens and to provide services. "The state should set the standards and provide the financing to make sure that there is equal distribution of services. Those CSOs that provide services, maybe they are better at delivering, should be contracted to do it on behalf of the state."

The second day of the meeting saw more intense discussions on capacity building around the theme of 'Developing Capacity for Africa's Economic and Social Transformation'. "Future generations will never forgive us, if we do not provide the required support and attention to a pan-African institution such as ACBF," said Hon. Phelekezela Mphoko, the Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe as he officially launched the ACBF's Silver Jubilee celebration. Zimbabwe's Minister for Finance Patrick Chinamasa declared, "We are committed to seeing Africa succeed."

The focus of the day was largely on making arguments for continued support of the ACBF. Zimbabwe's Vice President Phelekezela Presided over the opening. The ACBF executive secretary, Prof Emmanuel Nnadozie, set the scene for the day with a wide-ranging speech thanking member countries for the support they had given the Foundation over the past 25 years. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, the UNDP regional director for Africa, fired the audience with the assertion that the "Africa rising" narrative can no longer be denied. "Africa has over the past decade made the greatest economic gains than any other region in the world", Dieye insisted. "The largest 11 countries in sub-Saharan Africa have seen growth rates of over 51 per cent in the past 10 years according to Bloomberg, twice the global average of 23 per cent. "At the same time, poverty is declining. Since 1996, the average poverty rate in sub-Saharan African countries has fallen by about one percentage point per year, and between 2005 and 2008, the portion of Africans living on less than \$1.25 a day fell for the first time, from 52 per cent to 48 per cent."

Mrs Mary Manneko Monyau, the AfDB officer in charge of the Zimbabwe Field Office said that "energy is the engine that powers economies and creates a prosperous society". She echoed the assertion that, "Africa cannot remain in the dark in nearly 140 years after the light bulb was invented." Adding that "African countries must be in the driving seat and domestic resources must be the key". "Africa certainly has untapped potential to generate the resources needed for its socio-economic transformation." she pointed out that "remittances to Africa have risen from \$11 billion in 2000 to over \$62 billion in 2014. Sovereign Wealth Funds assets under management in Africa have risen from \$114 billion in 2009 to \$162 billion in 2014. Pension funds currently stand at \$334 billion. And Africa today generates about \$500 billion in domestic taxes." Based on this, the AfDB is now encouraging African leaders to think differently to mobilize all these domestic resources to accelerate development.

Dr Soumana Sako, a former Executive Secretary of ACBF and also a former prime minister and finance minister of Mali, raised issues against donors who try to be backseat drivers, remote control in hand. He likened their approach to African development to a car being driven while being managed by remote control. Such

donors, Dr Sako said, should stay in the car, so that if the car should crash, they and the African driver would crash together.

The Zimbabwe VP praised the ACBF for the good work done in the last 25 years, saying, "25 years ago, wherever one looked in Africa, the state of capacity had been very alarming. But while admitting that a lot still needs to be done, the picture is quite different today with most African countries supported with capacity building – thanks to institutions, such as the ACBF." Based on this good work, the Vice President called on "fellow Africans who have a vision for the continent in the spirit of pan-African solidarity" to support the ACBF for the implementation of sustainable capacity building solutions for inclusive socio-economic development. The VP declared that "*Future generations will never forgive us, if we do not provide the required support and attention to a pan-African institution such as ACBF*".

This echoed what Prof Nnadozie had pointed out regarding Africa's capacity needs. The continent's current share of global engineers stood at 35 engineers per one million people, compared to 168 for Brazil, 2,457 for the European Union, and 4,103 for the United States. "Just in 2011, over 10,000 medical graduates who were born or trained in Africa migrated and were registered to practice in the United States alone. The continent has only 2 per cent of the world's doctors though it bears around 24 per cent of the global burden of diseases. And only 28 per cent of students in Africa are enrolled in science and technology." Africa therefore needs to support the ACBF for it to support Africa to overcome these challenges.

During a side event, it was noted that the lack of accountability and political will are a critical explanation for Africa's lack of development. The event which focused on the multi-sectoral inter-linkages between health, human development and Africa's capacity for social and economic transformation was held on the first day of the Third African Capacity Development Forum. Speakers decried the shortage of medical doctors and persistent violence against women across Africa, as they raised other challenges facing the continent, including the lack of potable water, illiteracy and malnutrition, among others. The picture painted was dismal. According to the speakers, 69 per cent of Somalis and 54 per cent of Congolese have no access to potable

water. And when it comes to the effects of climate change, Chad typifies the continent's dilemma. Lake Chad, for instance, has lost more than 10 per cent of its 1963 size. The chair of the side event, Prof Abdi Issa, the Managing Director of HESPI in Ethiopia, led the charge when he called attention to the lack of political will on the part of leaders in implementing decisions. Beyond inadequate accountability and the lack of political will, Prof Issa contended that tackling these issues in a holistic manner was most crucial to the continent's development, especially meeting targeted goals under the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the African Agenda 2063. Mr. Rotimi Sankore of Afri-Dev Info said if Africa did not act on the issue of accountability, little could be achieved. He pointed out that most African leaders gave priority to cabinet members who helped their political careers as against those who were in the core development and health sectors.

The third and last day of the meeting was focused on the theme, "*Moving forward into the next 25 years ... From building to retention*". In the words of the ACBF Executive Secretary, "while the past 25 years had been successful in terms of the achievements made by the ACBF and its member countries, especially in terms of human capital and institutions, much more remains to be done". He drew the attention of participants to the ACBF's Strategic Plan 2017- 2021 and its four pillars – enabling effective delivery of continental development priorities; supporting countries to achieve tangible development results; enhancing private sector and civil society contribution to sustainable development; and leveraging learning and knowledge to attain greater development effectiveness. He highlighted the importance of high-level tripartite education dialogue among the private sector, training institutions, and African governments on how to develop capacity for implementing Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. He asserted, "Capacity utilization, capacity retention and capacity harmonization, including the sustainability of capacity projects are key issues," pointing out that "African universities should educate African young people to solve Africa's problems". If people get the education that is Africa-specific, the chances are that they will utilize it here rather than going somewhere else to practice," he noted.



Making the closing keynote speech, Dr. Hesphina Rukato former deputy CEO of NEPAD shared a memory of the excitement that met the adoption of NEPAD in 2001. Yet less than 20 years later, she noted, "the Africa we want, others have always wanted it before us: For roughly 50 years, Africans have been articulating the desire for "The Africa that we want", but to achieve success, it is imperative that the conversations go along with urgent and sustained action at the grassroots level.

She pointed out that it seemed the excitement has dissipated, leading her to question "why are we now jumping onto the next bandwagon before we have implemented any of the things that we have talked about before?" She observed that three things in particular impeded Africans from the needed self-analysis. The first was what she called "gate-keeping", whereby we protect leaders from the actual realities of the situation on the ground. The second was our failure

to empower the citizenry, training them to be "computers rather than decision makers". The last was not creating a space where civil servants could tell the truth without fear for their safety. Closing her speech, Dr. Rukato reiterated a statement with which she started the address: "This Africa we want, others have wanted it before us. Since I was born I have wanted it..." However, wanting alone was not enough: We need to move faster and we need to sacrifice more and to be more serious".