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Policy Brief

Achieving Sustainable Development Goals in Africa through Peaceful Transition

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CONTENTS

- 04** EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
- 06** KEY POINTS
- 07** INTRODUCTION
- 08** SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS
IN FOCUS
- 11** THE CHALLENGES
ENCOUNTERED
- 12** THE WAY FORWARD
- 13** CONCLUSION
- 15** REFERENCES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

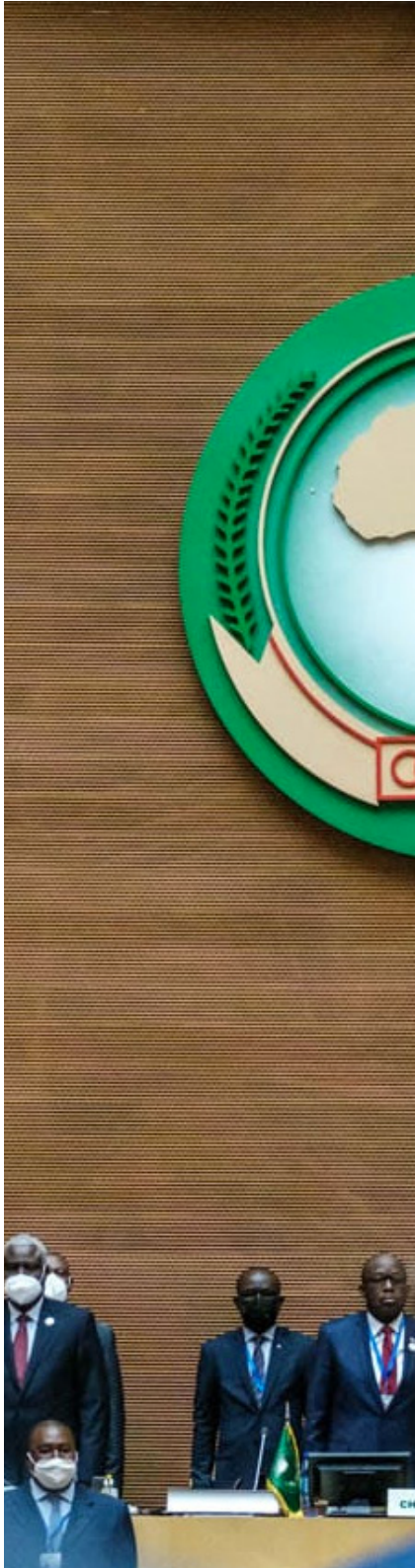


The success of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) depends on the assumption that countries will manage the programme in their respective national context, as well as design and learn from the experiences of other countries on the globe and meet the United Nations goals. To ensure a better implementation of the SDGs, the peaceful power transition of incumbents to democratically-elected opposition groups is imperative.

Considering the nexus between SDGs and peaceful power transition, the paper examines the challenges, implications, and prospects in the African context. The paper argues that peaceful power transition is a prerequisite for the success of SDGs. The paper considers the implications of the challenges and suggests that Africa should pave the way in the achievement of Agenda 2063, centenary celebration of the continent's organization. SDGs are planned to bring better social, economic, and political stability on the globe including Africa by 2030. To fulfill both the 2030 and 2063 agendas, Africa needs the prevalence of peace and security. To achieve these, the consolidation of democratic governance and building institutions is vital to the success of democracy in the continent. This in turn positively impacts the successful achievement of the SDGs. Some countries must draw lessons from success stories and implement them in their respective territories. Otherwise, success remains a wish and makes the future of Africa bleak.

KEY POINTS

- In 2015, the period for the implementation of MDGs wound up and the UN decided to upgrade the development efforts by designing SDGs, so that the world reaches a certain level of development.
- In the last decade in Africa, some governments were replaced by illegal and unlawful coup makers, and this has wreaked havoc in parts of the continent and resulted in chaos and lack of peace and security.
- Development efforts need the prevalence of peace and security. Lack of peace and security hampers democratic governance and the smooth power transition from incumbents to democratically-elected opposition forces.
- Agenda 2030, the SDGs ultimatum paves the way for Agenda 2063, the centenary of the continents organization. Hence, for the success of the SDGs as well as the centenary celebration, Africans should exert a lot of effort to realize both.
- Elections that take place in the respective countries must be free, fair and acceptable in many standards and should help Africa to catch up with the rest of the world for its more than a billion population.



INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) based on the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) were instituted by the United Nations with a plan to achieve the desired outcomes by 2030. With eight years remaining until the deadline, several important questions have to be addressed: (i) How much has been achieved so far? (ii) How much outstanding work is left to be achieved? (iii) Can the SDGs be fully attained given the limited time remaining? (iv) What is the nexus between SDGs plans and the prevalence of peace and security? And (v) what is expected from Africans to succeed in implementing the SDGs?

In the continent, there are visible power struggles among various groups. Power transitions are smooth in some countries, while such transitions are fraught with challenges in other countries. Africa should draw lessons from those countries that implemented peaceful power transitions in their respective countries and consolidated democratic governance in their territories.¹

This paper attempts to examine the relationship between the SDGs and peaceful power transition. What are the internal as well as external factors that threaten the peaceful transfer of power? And what should be done to alleviate those challenges? Can the SDGs be successful considering the peace challenges Africa is facing? Can some countries learn from the success stories others have? These are some of the questions to be addressed in this paper.

As disputes and conflicts are rampant in Africa and elsewhere, affecting the daily lives and the peaceful co-existence of different countries and groups; peace is mandatory to the success of SDGs. Recently, unlawful government changes occurred in Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso.² These changes have challenged the peaceful transition of power, which the African Union is striving to achieve. African Union (AU) did not give recognition to these illegal power snatching as it is both contrary to United Nations (UN) conventions and AU's charter. A recently published UN leaflet discussed the following:

- 1 Harrison Adewale Idowu and N. Oluwafemi Mimiko (2020), *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Volume 16, No.1, p161-195.
- 2 MO IBRAHIM FOUNDATION. (2022). *Western Africa's recent coups: highlight the risk of trading off development for security, the rule of law and rights.*

National engagement is critical in UN transition processes. For transitions to help consolidate and sustain peace efforts as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, their timing, modalities, and outcomes must be determined and implemented with national counterparts, including civil society networks and women's organizations and coalitions. (UN 2020 report: p 2)

With regards to the African Union (AU), there have been observable transformations of governance and the rule of law. African countries have abided by the rules of the AU as were agreed in Durban, South Africa in its inauguration³. However, there appears to be increasing incidences of changes of governments without due process of law and outside the legal framework.

As a result, it is critical to consider how the SDGs can be met while ensuring a smooth transition of power from one group to the next. This must also be consistent with achieving good governance in the respective countries as well as the success of SDGs. What is the nexus between peaceful transition of power and SDGs achievement? This paper attempts to discuss the SDGs in relation to peaceful power transitions in the African context, as well as to indicate the programmes attainable and non-attainable aspects and the way forward.

3 Abdalla Bujra. (2002). Africa: From the OAU to the African Union. Cooperation South: Libya, Tripoli.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN FOCUS

The SDGs were framed from the 169 targets of MDGs, which were partially fulfilled. After the 2015 meeting of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, the MDGs achievements⁴ were evaluated and what remained to be done was discussed thoroughly with a plan to achieve them by 2030. The goals were reduced to 17 areas of concern, while the rest were considered as being attained. The areas of focus include education, health, energy, agriculture, environment, peace and security and infrastructure development, among others. The author presents in this paper some of the SDGs with pertinent explanations. However, the success of the SDGs largely depends on the cooperation between international agencies and executing local institutions that are entrusted with the implementation of the activities in addition to some other factors.

To briefly explain SDGs and related issues, the author has selected some aspects selectively. Among these, education, health and eradication

of hunger and food security are discussed here as examples. By 2030, SDGs aim to provide Information Technology (IT) supported primary and secondary education to all persons who enroll in educational institutions. They also aim to design an education system that is equitable and inclusive of all denominators, regardless of religion, ethnicity, and other factors. Furthermore, for Africa to catch up with the rest of the world, tertiary education should be promoted. The quality of graduate and post-graduate programmes is solely dependent on the resources required for success and a safe environment in which to work. To achieve SDG 4, which refers to education and plans to create lifelong learning for the needy, holistic, and integrated programmes must be implemented. The various conflicts that have erupted and continue to erupt in various parts of the continent have a negative impact on this desired outcome. Hence, peace and security are very conducive prerequisites for achieving the set goals in the education sector. Conflict, while unavoidable, must

4 UN. (2011). The Millennium Development Goals Report. New York.

be reduced to achieve the sector's goals. The success of the SDG 4 solely depends on the prevalence of peace and security in the continent. Countries with the prevalence of peace have achieved better compared to countries with lack of peace and security.

Africa fares poorly where health facilities, health professionals and conditions are concerned. The SDG 3 refers to the health sector plans to eradicate epidemics such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases by 2030. Through the help of the MDGs, Africa has attained some achievements in the health sector such as decreasing infant mortality rate, maternal deaths and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS compared to the scenario in the pre-MDGs phase. Although several things were performed in relation to health aspects, Africa didn't achieve what it planned in the MDGs. In terms of health sector performance, Africa lags behind the other continents. As a result, the need to work hard in this sector to keep up with the rest of the world in combating communicable and non-communicable diseases remains critical. Malnutrition, mental disorder,

and injuries affect Africa more than the rest of the world.⁵ A large portion of Africa, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, has little or no access to health care. Africa has the lowest level of financing for the health sector. As a result, fostering health sector programs is unavoidable to close the gap between Africa and the rest of the world.

SDG 2 refers to eradicating hunger, achieving food security, and promoting sustainable development. This is the area where Africa should exert every effort to end hunger, become self-sufficient in food and avoid the unsustainable debt trap. As Africa imports food and associated materials from other sources, primarily the west, it should eventually become self-sufficient so that the next generation will be concerned with something beyond daily needs.⁶ Africa can be self-sufficient and achieve its agricultural goals if it has access to improved seeds, sustainable irrigation systems, sustainable agricultural inputs and fertilizer use, improved infrastructure, and market systems, and improved agricultural programme implementation. This will result in integrated development. The

5 The Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa. (2017). Africa 2030: How Africa can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Version 2, November 2017.

6 "On average, agriculture employs 65% of Africa's labor force and accounts for approximately 32% of gross Domestic Product (GDP), reflecting the relatively poor productivity in the sector" (The Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa: Africa 2030, p34).

sustenance of peace is decisive as conflicts and disputes that emanate from electoral malpractices will disrupt the practical validity of the desired programmes in this sector.

The other SDGs include Gender Equality, Clean water and Sanitation, Decent work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure Development, Reducing Inequality, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, and other issues, which are important for the betterment of future generations and peaceful co-existence of citizens of the whole world. All in all, the SDGs are 17 including the most important aspects such as economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social inclusion. The SDGs

components are interwoven and related and hence the success of one aspect impacts the other.

African leaders adopted Agenda 2063 in 2013, which incorporated seven aspirations that resemble the SDGs.⁷ The motto for Africa 2063 is inclusive growth and sustainable development having at least 7.5% annual growth.⁸ Agenda 2063 and SDGs both aim to achieve similar goals. Both the AU and the UN play critical roles in assisting African countries in realizing their dreams. African states and governments require the prevalence of peace and security as a prerequisite for realizing the goals and objectives of both programmes.

7 Africa Renewal: Sustainable Development Goals in Sync with Africa's priorities, p5

8 Ibid.

THE CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Problems regarding power transition are among the major challenges that African countries encounter. Political power alteration refers to power transition from incumbents to democratically-elected opposition forces.⁹ Governments in power want to elongate their terms at times by amending their constitution, in order to stay in power for another term.¹⁰ In addition to that, as is observed in most of the elections in Africa, winners take all the power and sharing power with the other parties and groups is not customary as far as African political experience is concerned.¹¹ Moreover, contested elections that do not meet international standards are the other problem Africa encounters.¹²

As has been observed, peaceful transition was only possible in a few countries, including Ghana, Botswana, and South Africa, to name a few. Previous elections in Kenya, Ethiopia, Madagascar, and other African countries had disastrous

consequences. Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso¹³ are examples of countries where military forces seized power from democratically-elected governments by citing various reasons as justifications for doing so. The AU has adopted protocols that deny official recognition to governments and leaders who gain power through “illegal” means. Not only that, but corruption, illicit financial flows, youth migration, religious and ethnic-based insurgencies, a lack of good governance, and human rights violations are some of the pressing issues that many African countries face.

Countries that have democratically-elected governments can implement the SDGs together within a peaceful environment for their people. On the other hand, countries like Somalia, CAR (Central African Republic), Mali, South Sudan and some others have internal problems that hinder the successful achievement of the

9 Harrison Adewale Idowu and N. Oluwafemi Mimiko (2020). *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Volume 16, No.1, p165.

10 Denis M Tull and Claudia Simons. (2017). *Africa Spectrum*, 52, 2, 79-102.

11 Spears, S Ian. (2000). *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 21: 105-118.

12 Leonard, David K. (2008). *Journal of African elections*. Vol. 8. No. 1: 1-13.

13 MO IBRAHIM FOUNDATION. (2022). *Western Africa's recent coups: highlight the risk of trading off development for security, the rule of law and rights.*

SDGs as government structures are disrupted continuously because of lack of peace in their respective countries. So, those having problems should get lessons from the success stories Africa has.

The recent COVID-19 impact that has affected the whole world has impacted Africa's development to a greater degree. Africa has lost labour force, including experiencing huge economic slowdown. The current Russo-Ukrainian War is also affecting the whole world but seriously affects developing nations including Africa countries.

THE WAY FORWARD

To improve Africa, the AU as a continental organization, must design and implement programmes that help to deter problems the continent is facing. Understanding inclusiveness in their political practices, administering fair and free elections regularly and learning from the better experiences of countries with best practices in peace and security are some of the things Africans should pay attention to in their governance experiences.

Africa, with the assistance of the AU and other stakeholders, must recognize only leaders who came to power through legal and democratic processes. This should be the corner-stone of the union, so that others who want to improve their respective countries should do so only through legal means.

The AU should study the EU (which has fared much better in health, green legacy and shaping the future of Europe¹⁴), as the latter are in a better position regarding continental relations are concerned. AU must transcend itself based on its charter and ensure successful African intra-continental relations in the economic, political, and social spheres, so that Africa will become an integrated continent in the true sense of the term.

Africa should intensify African Solutions to African Problems (ASAP) especially since Africans know their problems better than others. African cultural, social, political, and economic realities should be taken into account by Africans themselves to find solutions for African problems. As the population of Africa is exceeding 1.3 billion, Africa should strive to get a seat at the UN Security Council, so that African

14 European Commission. (2021). State of the Union by the President of the European Commission.

voices are heard by the international community and exert influence globally. In addition to that, to better tackle problems related to the current Ukraine-Russia crisis, Africa should stand together and develop its own network to mitigate the impact.

UN, European Union (EU) and other partners should help to change the existing picture of Africa. They must share their experiences of good governance and democratic practice, so that Africa will end up with a better perception globally. If Africa is able to use its resources properly for the development of Africa, migration, civil disobedience, conflicts, hunger and other problems will be minimized and the way to foster integrated development will be crystal clear and attainable. Based on the data found, African transition and democratic experiences are

lagging behind East European and Latin American countries, because of the astute authoritarian rulers and politically inept pro-democracy forces.¹⁵ What follows later coincides with the predisposed scenario abundantly. African heads of state and governments must work hard to achieve what they have set in 2030 along with the rest of the world, as well as Agenda 2063, to witness a better Africa during the centenary celebrations. To achieve the SDGs and Agenda 2063, the AU must strengthen RECs and other organizational networks. To achieve a better Africa, African youth, women, and citizens have to engage in cooperation and build bilateral, trilateral and other regional networks.

15 Mozaffar, Shaheen (1997). Democratic Transitions in Africa. Bridge water review. Bridge-water State University. Vol. 16. Issue. 2., Article 6.

CONCLUSION

The success of the SDGs depends on both the readiness of the AU to implement them and the prevalence of peace and security in the continent. Alternation of power from incumbent to democratically-elected opposition groups must be done on peaceful terms, managing fair, free, and credible elections in the respective countries. In addition to that, building strong democratic culture paves the way for peaceful power alterations as experiences depict. Various institutions such as civil society organizations, religious leaders and the international community can play better roles and influence the peaceful alternations of incumbents to opposition forces that win elections. In addition to that, peace and security firms play great roles for the consolidation of democracy in the respective countries. Moreover, individual leaders and incumbent parties can play better roles if they think beyond their individual and party ambitions. The nexus between SDGs and peaceful power transfer is that the success of the latter positively impacts the success of the former. The AU must act, as the current scenario demands the practical implementation of programmes based on the needs of Africans. Otherwise, Africa could lose its values if it does not act fast as the new generation demands.

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