1. OVERVIEW

The 2023/24 Human Development Report (HDR) comes at a pivotal moment for Africa. While the continent faces stark human development challenges amidst an uncertain and polarized global landscape, Africa also has immense opportunities to harness the power of regional cooperation to advance shared prosperity and resilience.

The report reveals a multifaceted view of global and regional development challenges and progress. Notably, it highlights the persistent and emerging challenges in Africa, including the impacts of climate change, the prevalence of informal economies, and the need for improved governance and institutional frameworks to support human development.

Africa has shown time and again its resilience and creativity in the face of immense challenges. By focusing on Africa’s opportunities for enhanced solidarity and collaboration, this HDR regional launch aims to identify pathways for the continent to break gridlock and build a more peaceful, prosperous, and integrated future. The time is now to rekindle the flame of pan-African cooperation - and light the way for the world.

2. CONTEXT

Africa’s Development Challenges and Opportunities

Recent shocks have underscored both Africa’s vulnerabilities and its potential for solidarity. The COVID-19 pandemic had severe impacts, with over 175,000 lives lost across Africa as of February 2023. 57% of African countries experienced a decline in HDI in 2020, and by 2023 37% of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and 30% of North African countries are projected to remain below pre-pandemic HDI levels.

However, the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) exemplifies how regional collaboration is vital to address transboundary risks. Africa CDC played an instrumental
role in coordinating the continent’s pandemic response, establishing regional collaborative centers and securing vaccines through the COVID-19 Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT). This contributed to over 70% of the population in 20 African countries receiving at least one vaccine dose. There is much to build upon in enhancing regional health security cooperation.

Climate change poses existential risks to Africa’s development, with the continent warming faster than the global average. North Africa is projected to face the highest temperature increases globally, equivalent to 2-3 times the global mean, while mortality rates due to higher temperatures are expected to increase sharply in the Sahel. Yet here too there are opportunities for joint action, such as through the Pan-African Agency for the Great Green Wall initiative to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land across 11 countries in the Sahel-Saharan region. Increased climate finance and technology transfer to Africa through multilateral climate funds and South-South cooperation will be crucial to scale up adaptation and low-carbon development.

With the world’s youngest population and a burgeoning middle class, Africa’s economic potential is immense. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides an opportunity to accelerate job creation, women’s economic empowerment, industrial development, and economic diversification. The Economic Commission for Africa estimates the AfCFTA could boost intra-African trade by over 50% and lift 30 million Africans out of extreme poverty by 2035. Increased commercial diplomacy and engagement of Africa’s dynamic private sector and digital innovators will be vital to realizing these gains.

However, peace and stability remain preconditions for progress. Africa has been grappling with a ‘coup epidemic’, with eight coups and attempted coups between 2021-22 alone. The recent departure of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is concerning; research shows that instability can be contagious across borders. Investing in addressing root causes of insecurity and supporting democratic governance will be paramount. Regional institutions like the African Union have key roles to play in conflict prevention and mediation.

The HDR highlights how polarization and zero-sum thinking undermine the trust and compromise needed for collective action. Africa is not immune to these trends. Afrobarometer surveys suggest only 31% of Africans believe their government is doing well in fighting corruption and 37% are ‘not at all’ or ‘just a little bit’ trusting of the African Union. Narrowing gaps in agency and voice will be vital to strengthen legitimacy of regional institutions. Education and youth empowerment can also nurture a new generation of leaders to take forward the pan-African vision.

**UNDP’s Role in Fostering Cooperation**

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) plays a crucial role in supporting African countries to improve global cooperation. By leveraging its extensive network in 170 countries and expertise, UNDP facilitates regional initiatives that address the continent’s specific needs, promote sustainable development, and strengthen institutional frameworks for long-term resilience.

UNDP has long supported regional integration and South-South cooperation in Africa, from country-level support for AfCFTA implementation to key knowledge products like the Africa Futures Report and partnership with the AfCFTA Secretariat. As the HDR spotlights, Multilateral
Development Banks (MDBs) like the African Development Bank have a vital role in financing regional public goods like clean energy and pandemic preparedness.

### 3. KEY FINDINGS FROM 2023/24 HDR FOR AFRICA

Some of the key findings in the 2023/24 HDR that are relevant to the African context include:

**Climate Change and Inequality**

Africa is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to its geographic exposure, low adaptive capacity, and socioeconomic challenges. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects that by 2050, climate change could expose an additional 80-120 million people in Africa to water stress, reduce crop yields by up to 50% in some regions, and increase the risk of climate-related diseases such as malaria and dengue fever.

The Human Climate Horizons platform from UNDP shows that under a moderate emissions scenario, mortality rates in Sub-Saharan Africa could increase by 73 deaths per 100,000 by 2100 due to higher temperatures alone, compared to a net decrease of 10 deaths per 100,000 in high-income countries. This stark disparity highlights the potential for climate change to exacerbate inequalities between and within countries.

**Informal Economy**

The informal sector is a critical part of Africa’s economic landscape. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), informal employment accounts for 85.8% of total employment in Africa, the highest rate globally. In sub-Saharan Africa, 89.2% of employed women and 82.7% of employed men are in the informal sector.

While the informal sector provides livelihoods for millions of Africans, it also poses challenges for inclusive growth and social protection. Workers in the informal economy often lack access to social safety nets, fair wages, and decent working conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the vulnerabilities of informal workers, with the ILO estimating that earnings for informal workers in Africa declined by 81% in the first month of the crisis.

**Human Development Trends**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on human development progress in Africa. While the continent has made gains in recent decades, the pandemic threatens to reverse many of these achievements. According to the 2021/22 HDR, sub-Saharan Africa’s HDI value declined by 0.55% between 2019 and 2020, compared to a global average decline of 0.35%.

Education has been hit particularly hard, with school closures affecting over 250 million students in Africa. The World Bank estimates that this could result in a loss of 0.6 years of schooling on average, with long-term consequences for learning outcomes and future earnings. In terms of health, disruptions to essential services due to COVID-19 could lead to an additional 69,000 malaria deaths and 492,000 HIV deaths in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020 alone.
Institutional and Agency Gaps

Africa faces significant challenges in terms of institutional capacity and human agency. According to the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), overall governance progress in Africa has slowed since 2015, with deteriorations in key areas such as security, rule of law, and human rights. In 2019, the average African country scored just 48.8 out of 100 on overall governance.

The erosion of democratic norms and practices is a worrying trend, with the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project reporting that 70% of African countries experienced declines in liberal democracy between 2010 and 2020. Populist pressures and polarization are also on the rise, fueled by economic grievances, identity politics, and perceptions of corruption and elite capture.

Strengthening institutions, enhancing human agency, and fostering more inclusive and accountable governance will be critical for Africa to navigate the challenges of the 21st century and seize the opportunities of greater regional and global cooperation. This will require sustained investments in education, health, and social protection, as well as reforms to promote transparency, participation, and the rule of law. By empowering citizens and communities to shape their own futures and hold their leaders accountable, Africa can build the foundations for a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable development path.

4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE AFRICA REGIONAL LAUNCH OF THE 2023/24 HDR

1. **Promote Understanding:** Increase awareness of the HDR 2023/24 findings, focusing on how recent global shocks have impacted Africa and the need for enhanced cooperation.

2. **Drive Policy Action:** Encourage dialogue and action on key issues such as climate resilience, economic integration via AfCFTA, and the strengthening of regional and continental institutions.

3. **Leverage Partnerships:** Foster collaboration between African nations, UNDP, and other stakeholders to address shared challenges and capitalize on the opportunities presented by the AfCFTA and other regional initiatives.

5. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Development of a clear action plan to leverage regional cooperation for sustainable and equitable economic growth.
- Strengthened regional cooperation to address the challenges posed by climate change and geopolitical shifts.
- Enhanced capacity of African nations and regional bodies to manage transitions and shocks effectively.
- Signaling that Africa’s positions are clear, achievable, and necessary, and that the continent stands together in insisting on reforms that work for Africa.
6. EXPECTED PARTICIPANTS

The launch event will bring together a diverse group of participants, including:

- Ministers and senior government officials;
- African Multilateral Financial Institutions;
- Regional Economic Communities;
- African Think Tanks and Policy Institutes;
- International Organizations and Development Partners;
- Civil Society, Academia and Media.
AGENDA

Opening and Introductions
Moderator (t.b.d.)

Welcoming remarks
Mr. Matthias Naab
Director, UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa

Framing Remarks
Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa
Director, Regional Bureau for Africa, UNDP

Goodwill messages from key regional leaders
H.E. Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa, Deputy Chairperson, African Union Commission
H.E. Professor Fatou Sow Sarr, Commissioner for Human Development and Social Affairs, ECOWAS
H.E Mohammed Abdi Ware, Deputy Executive Secretary, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

Video summary of key findings
Dr. Pedro Conceicao
Director Human Development Report Office, UNDP

Panel Discussion
Ambassador Michelle Manda
Cavendish University, Zambia
Dr. Abbi Kedir
Executive Secretary a.i., Africa Economic Research Consortium
Dr. Emezat Mengesha
Head, Gender Equality Program
Dr. Anicia Lala
Senior Expert, Africa Security Studies Network
Ms. Pato Kelesitse
Founder and Director, Sustain 267, Botswana
Dr. Paul Simon Handy
Regional Director East Africa and Representative to the AU

Question & Answer Session
Moderator (t.b.d.)

Closing Remarks
Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa
Director, Regional Bureau for Africa, UNDP