

Why strategic foresight matters for Africa

Julia Schünemann

Summary

Over the past five decades, Africa has experienced great transition and change. Many positive developments are taking shape on the continent. Overall, human development is improving, conflict has declined and sustained economic growth presents genuine opportunities for development. Yet many structural challenges persist, and the pressure to tackle these simultaneously is probably the most complex task the continent faces today. Africa needs to deepen its strategic reflection in order to anticipate the future with confidence. It must think more systematically about long-term trends and plan for the future if it is to take advantage of opportunities arising from economic growth.

IN A CONTEXT of rapid global change and uncertainty, Africa needs to deepen its strategic reflection in order to ensure peace and prosperity for all its people. It must think more systematically about long-term trends and plan for the future if it is to improve the design and implementation of public policies and take advantage of opportunities arising from sustained economic growth. African policymakers are increasingly aware of the need to understand change and plan for the future to promote human development and security. The African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063¹ illustrates this trend, and there are many other efforts underway on the regional, national and subnational level.² This reflects increased ownership of long-term development

planning and the resurgence of the notion of the developmental state in Africa,³ that is, consensus on the central role of the state in inclusive development. It also dovetails with the fact that aid to Africa has decreased from its peak in the early 1990s, translating into less external dependence on development financing.

Developing a culture and practice of long-term strategic thinking is not a trivial undertaking. Futures work requires the disciplined application of structured techniques, which is costly, time-consuming and rarely conclusive. It also relies on good data. Despite recent improvements, most African countries still lag behind in the collection and harmonisation of basic reliable data,

as well as the strengthening of national statistical systems.⁴

Futures work comes in many guises spanning a broad range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.⁵ The African Futures Project,⁶ a collaboration between the Institute for Security Studies (ISS)⁷ and the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures at the University of Denver,⁸ supports evidence-based policy planning via quantitative analysis and modelling based on the International Futures (IFs) model. While not a panacea, IFs can help shape expectations about the unfolding of human development across key systems, and anticipate the likely outcomes of policy interventions via scenario analysis.⁹

This discussion paper has three parts. The first section will address the relevance and importance of strategic foresight in the current African development context. Section two will draw on the experience of the African Futures Project and elaborate how the application of an integrated forecasting model such as IFs could inform the Agenda 2063 process. To conclude, the final section will put forward a series of recommendations on how to promote futures work in Africa. This paper also seeks to provide evidence of the value of quantitative modelling for human development to help make the case that investing in strengthening data and statistics is crucial for developing countries.

Why strategic foresight matters for Africa

As Africa celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) the continent's prospects for human development look brighter than ever. Yet, while the current development path provides reasons for being optimistic about the future, many structural challenges persist.

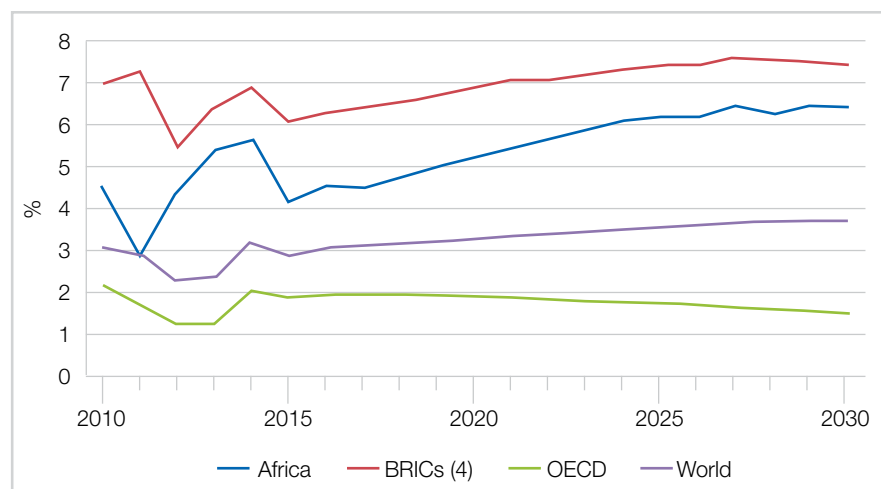
Today, Africa has some of the world's fastest-growing economies with annual

growth rates, in some instances, of over 8%. The debt burden has been reduced significantly, and new information and communication technologies are allowing Africa to leapfrog costly investments in related infrastructure. The continent is likely to continue to grow at an annual average rate of between 5 and 7% over the next 15 years (IFs and other forecasts). This is well above the world average and much faster than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average although not as fast as the BRICs 4 group (Brazil, Russia, India and China), as Figure 1 illustrates.

Links between Africa and the world have been strengthened – foreign direct investment (FDI), exports and imports have all risen dramatically – although Africa will remain marginal to the world economy, representing a share of 3,6% by 2030 and 8% by 2050 (in comparison to today's 2,6%). In some countries and regions economies are becoming increasingly diversified, which reflects the structural transformation of certain African countries.

Recent data for oil-rich Nigeria, for example, shows the extent to which the country's economy has diversified

Figure 1: Forecast of regional GDP growth rates, history and forecast, IFs base case

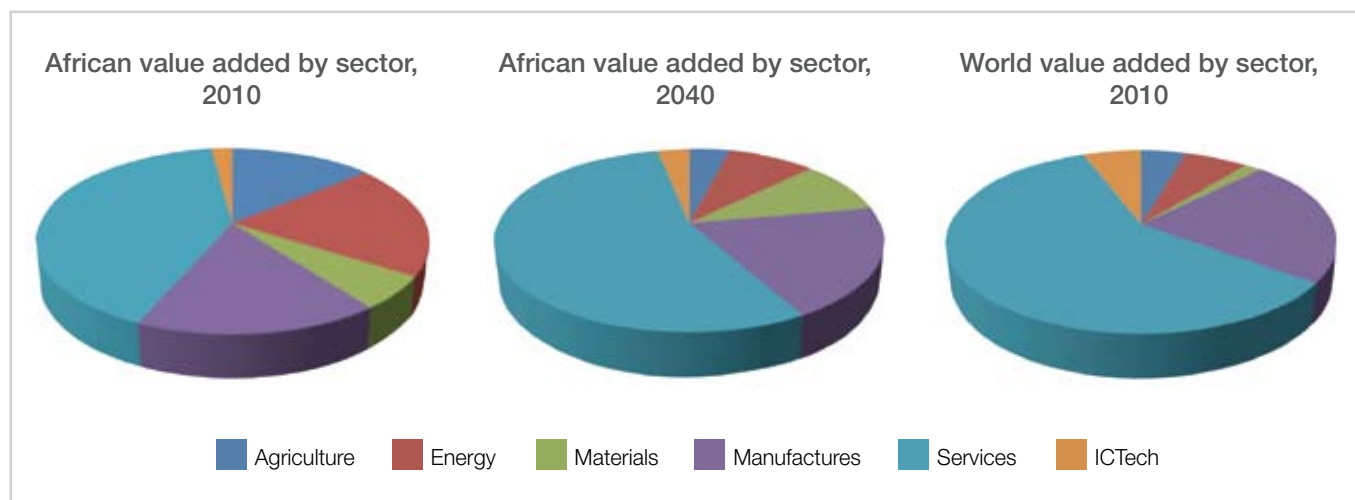


Source: Historical data from World Development Indicators, World Bank (2013). Forecast from IFs v7.05.



AFRICA HAS SOME OF THE WORLD'S FASTEST-GROWING ECONOMIES, WITH ANNUAL GROWTH RATES OF OVER 8% IN SOME INSTANCES

Figure 2: African added value by sector, 2010 and 2040 (\$2 005) compared to the world



Source: Forecast from IFs v7.05, historical data for initialisation of forecast (beginning in 2010) from the World Development Indicators, World Bank (2013)

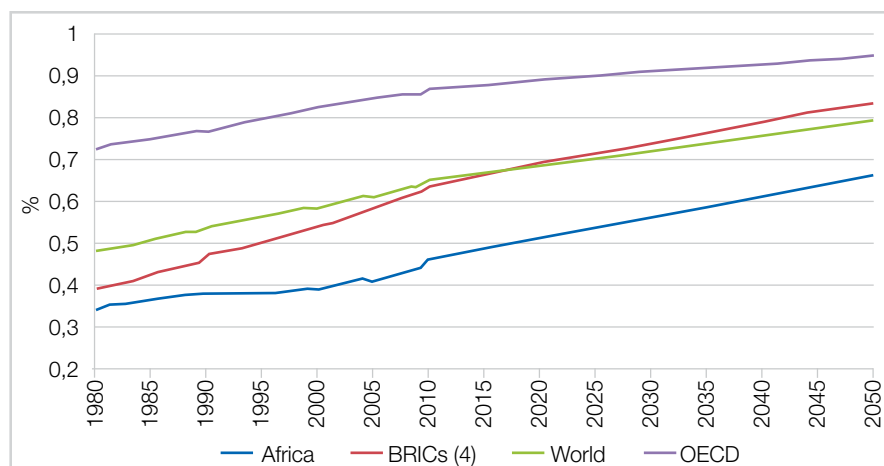
over the past decade, with services now contributing the biggest share.¹⁰ The general lack of regional economic integration on the continent, however, is an obstacle to creating economies of scale and increased (shared) prosperity. Population growth and, more specifically, the growth of Africa's working age population and urbanisation are likely to drive economic growth. However, if African economies struggle to productively employ the extra workers and especially if young people lack opportunities, societies will become more prone to violent conflict.¹¹

Overall, human development has improved across the continent and IFs forecasts Africa's Human Development Index to reach the current global average by 2050 (see Figure 3).

More and more people are attaining higher levels of education, and primary net enrolment – the percentage of age-appropriate children enrolled in school – is expected to grow from 75% today to over 95% by the 2040s. In addition, fewer people are dying from communicable diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, although increases in

deaths from non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, obesity and cancer are creating what is generally referred to as a double burden of disease (i.e. public health challenges stemming from both communicable and non-communicable diseases). African health systems will need to deal with both kinds of health concerns. From 1963 to the present, African gross domestic product (GDP) per capita has grown from US\$1 600 a year to over US\$2 800 a year (measured in purchasing power parity, or PPP). The IFs base case forecast is that this positive trend will be maintained into the future.

Figure 3: Regional Human Development Index values, history and forecast, IFs base case

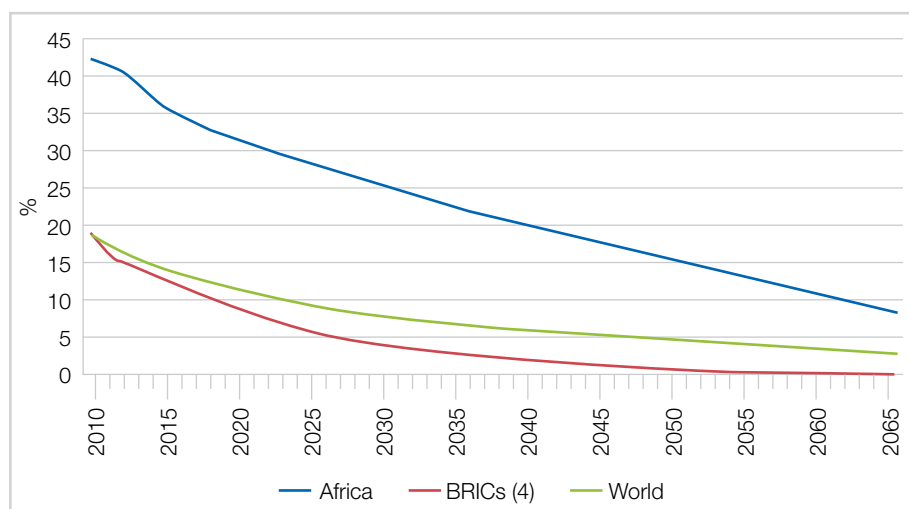


Source: Forecast from IFs v7.05, historical data for initialisation of forecast (beginning in 2010) from the UN Development Programme's Human Development Reports.

However, the degree and severity of poverty in many African countries are among the worst globally, and the IFs base case¹² forecast suggests that even though African countries should see steady improvements, by 2063 around 10% of the continent's population (around 310 million people) will still live in extreme poverty.¹³

Africa is the second most unequal region in the world after Latin America and the Caribbean, and high initial levels of inequality can compromise reductions in poverty and future growth rates.¹⁴ Very unequal societies are also more prone to

Figure 4: Forecasted share of population living on US\$1,25/day, IFs base case



Source: Forecast from IFs v7.05, historical data for initialisation of forecast (beginning in 2010) from the World Development Indicators, World Bank (2013).

high levels of violent crime. Environmental concerns are likely to occupy the centre stage in the near future, as Africa is extremely vulnerable to climate change and other environmental pressures such as declining biodiversity, the unavailability and poor quality of fresh water, land degradation, etc.¹⁵

Generally and contrary to what the mainstream media often conveys, the peace and security climate in Africa has been improving. Since the 1990s the number of wars in Africa has halved, and this positive trend is expected to continue, although the global increase in armed conflict since 2008 is also evident here. Lower-intensity conflict is becoming more prevalent and changing conflict dynamics, including the spread of transnational organised crime, terrorism and election-related violence, are posing new challenges.¹⁶ Average levels of democracy have seen large and sustained gains since the end of the Cold War, but the quality of governance remains a significant challenge, including in the areas of gender empowerment and democratic participation.

Many African countries are trapped somewhere in-between autocracy

and democracy, which makes them vulnerable to outbreaks of intrastate conflict, particularly because the transition towards greater democracy is often additionally unsettling. Moreover, in countries with large democratic deficits – where the demand for democracy based on levels of income, education, etc. is at odds with the actual supply – vulnerability to domestic instability is much higher.¹⁷ This is also the case because the ongoing democratisation of information leads to increased pressure for accountability towards citizens. The management of Africa’s resources is another area where better governance can be a game changer in support of sustainable development.¹⁸

Benefits of integrated policy analysis and planning

Much remains to be done in a multitude of interconnected areas to further advance human development and human security on the continent. As the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, famously put it, ‘Africa must run while others walk.’ In fact, Africa must start to lead, as its challenges are manifold. Thinking systematically about the future is a necessary condition for taking



LEVELS OF DEMOCRACY HAVE SEEN LARGE GAINS BUT THE QUALITY OF GOVERNANCE REMAINS A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE

advantage of existing opportunities as well as for dealing with change and uncertainty. The ability to formulate a strategic vision can also help with identifying priorities and building political agreement and developmental coalitions. As the recent 'Report of the Commission on the African Union Agenda 2063: the Africa we want in 2063' states, '[a] full understanding of the challenges and opportunities for attaining the "Africa we want by 2063" is essential in order to set the right goals and evolve the right strategies for getting there'.¹⁹

However, too few African governments and regional organisations undertake studies of long-term political, economic, social and security trends or engage in integrated policy analysis and scenario planning to inform policy decisions. Systematic efforts to acquire an adequate picture of the current situation (i.e. the baseline) remain rare. This shortcoming often translates into setting unrealistic and therefore unachievable development targets. Sensible monitoring and evaluation of implementation becomes impossible.

The eradication of extreme poverty (defined as income below US\$1,25 in 2005 PPP) in every African country by 2030, for example, is a key component of the emerging international consensus in the framework of the post-2015 development agenda. A recent paper published by the African Futures Project, entitled 'Reducing poverty in Africa: realistic targets for the post-2015 MDGs and Agenda 2063',²⁰ explored this goal. The paper found that many African states were unlikely to make this target by 2030 if current dynamics continued and even if a series of targeted interventions for eradicating poverty were implemented. Falling short of promised development outcomes undermines a state's legitimacy in terms of performance, as the question of legitimacy is intimately tied to the expectations of

society towards the state.²¹ Generally, people's expectations grow in line with improvements in human development, which only adds to the pressure that many African governments are feeling already. The next section will address the issue of setting aggressive but reasonable targets.

By adopting an integrated approach to thinking about the future, African policymakers can greatly improve their understanding of the outlook for the continent's economic, social, and environmental welfare and security and the tools at their disposal to shift the future goalposts. Integrated policy analysis, as it is understood by the African Futures Project, is the process of understanding development trends, setting aggressive but reasonable targets, and producing evidence-based assessments for the continent, regions and individual countries that can be

Integrated policy analysis is especially important, as various issues must be addressed at the same time within a resource-constrained environment

used for monitoring and evaluation. This process begins by analysing issue areas, both internally and as they interact with each other. Subsequently, it is possible to explore how development patterns have unfolded historically and project these patterns into the future.

This is the essence of quantitative integrated forecasting, as understood by the African Futures Project. Forecasts are generally viewed as being uncertain – a set of forecasts is often used to 'frame' uncertainty – while prediction implies belief in one forecast and rejection of others.²² In this sense, forecasting means thinking about possible futures in a structured manner. Scenario analysis allows for exploring the leverage that policy- and decision makers have

to push systems to more desirable development outcomes.

Integrated policy analysis is especially important for Africa because various important issues need to be addressed at the same time within a resource-constrained environment. Many African governments are under enormous pressure to juggle competing priorities and respond to the needs of their citizens. They are expected to simultaneously boost agricultural production, strengthen infrastructure, improve health and education, reduce poverty and inequality, boost economic growth and diversify their economies, manage natural resources in a sustainable manner, improve governance and security, and safeguard the environment. There are difficult choices to be made and complex trade-offs need to be considered. Putting resources

into infrastructure investment, such as roads, means limiting the resources available for other priority areas, such as maternal health or universal access to primary education.²³ Sometimes one policy objective, such as the provision of access to electricity, can undermine others, such as reducing carbon emissions in support of a greener economy. On the other hand, many choices and policies are complementary and generate positive spin-offs, for instance improved female secondary education and reductions in population growth rates.

This is why forecasting and evaluating strategic policy options and trade-offs between different choices are important.

A powerful tool: the International Futures forecasting system

Using a macro-scale model like IFs can be useful for addressing these kinds of challenges. IFs can help shape and manage expectations about current development trajectories; assess how changes in one issue area have an impact across multiple other areas; evaluate strategic policy choices; set aggressive but reasonable and customised targets; and develop strategies for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development plans and programmes.

African society to work together to build a prosperous and united Africa. Agenda 2063 looks at a time horizon of 100 years from the establishment of the OAU in 1963. The AU admits that '[50] years is, undoubtedly, an extremely long development planning horizon' and notes that it will be rolling out plans for 25, 10 and five years, and include various short-term action plans. After the adoption of the specifics of Agenda 2063 at the mid-year AU Summit in June 2014 in Malabo, the first 10-year implementation plan is scheduled for approval in January

Forecasting means thinking about possible futures in a structured manner

IFs is large-scale, long-term, highly integrated modelling software housed at the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver. Originally developed as an educational tool, the model forecasts hundreds of open source variables for 186 countries until 2100 using more than 2 700 historical series and sophisticated algorithms based on correlations found in academic literature.²⁴

The IFs software consists of 11 main modules: population, economics, energy, agriculture, infrastructure, health, education, socio-political, international political, technology and the environment. Each module is tightly connected with the other modules, creating dynamic relationships among variables across the entire system.²⁵ It is particularly well suited to the kind of high-level target-setting in an initiative as complex and long-term as Agenda 2063.

Informing the AU's Agenda 2063

In 2013, the AU launched Agenda 2063 as a call for action to all segments of

2015. A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework is expected to accompany the implementation plan.²⁶

In many senses Agenda 2063 is rooted in a different development philosophy than the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), finding its inspiration in the Lagos Plan of Action, the Abuja Treaty and the New Partnership for Africa's Development. It reflects an ambitious effort by Africans to accept greater ownership and chart a new direction for the future that has inclusive growth and the elimination of extreme poverty as key components.²⁷ Ideally, Agenda 2063 addresses some of the shortcomings of the MDG targets, which were sometimes perceived to be overly generalised, set in New York at the expenses of a more collaborative process, and unrealistic for many countries and issues.

Agenda 2063 is conceived as a comprehensive vision (and action plan) that seeks to improve development across a wide array of areas, including health, education, economy, infrastructure, agriculture, energy, gender, youth and governance, for the entire continent. It is explicitly results-

AGENDA
2063

LAUNCHED BY THE
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based and emphasises concrete targets that can be measured and monitored throughout.²⁸ It foresees implementation, monitoring and evaluation plans as well as national, regional and continental results frameworks. Integrated policy analysis and planning is a *sine qua non* condition for Agenda 2063 to succeed. In light of the diversity of the continent this needs to be done on a continental level as well as at regional and national levels.

The 'Report of the Commission on the African Union Agenda 2063' sets out seven aspirations for 2063, which provide the framework for setting goals, priority areas, targets and indicative strategies:

- A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development
- An integrated continent, politically united based on the idea of pan-Africanism
- 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, values and ethics
- An Africa where the development is people-driven, relying particularly on the potential of women and the youth
- Africa as a strong and influential player and partner

A series of goals and targets has already been set under these aspirations. AU member states are now encouraged to hold country-level consultations on the targets in order to inform the process.

The eradication of extreme poverty in Africa by 2030 is key to Agenda 2063. However, according to recent research on the prospect of reducing poverty in Africa, published by the African Futures Project, this target is unrealistic for many African states.²⁹ The authors of the paper used IFs to analyse the likelihood of reducing poverty in each country up

to 2063. 'The IFs base case suggests that even though African countries should see steady improvements, the majority will fail to meet the 3% extreme poverty goal by 2030, that is assuming a continuation of today's policy choices.' The paper concludes that 'the 3% extreme poverty goal is not a reasonable goal for many African countries' and that 'it is insensitive to the varying initial conditions African countries face'.³⁰ This finding holds even after the recent revision of PPP from 2005 to 2011 as new reference year by the World Bank's International Comparison Project³¹ – a development that saw a sharp drop in estimates of current extreme global poverty, including in Africa.

African countries vary widely in the extent and depth of extreme poverty, as well as the degree of income inequality. While close to 80% of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) population live in extreme poverty, for example, the percentage of people living on less than US\$1,25 a day (2005 PPP) in the Seychelles is close to zero. The highest concentrations of extreme poverty as a percentage of the population can be found in the DRC, Liberia,

the 3% extreme poverty target by 2030 without additional support or policy interventions,³² and out of these eight have already done so. However, even under a scenario that models targeted interventions to reduce extreme poverty – such as social assistance, pro-poor economic growth, human development for the marginalised and progressive social change – Africa as a whole does not make the 3% target by 2030. Outcomes for different countries vary considerably, and different interventions do not yield the same results in different contexts. Under a combined intervention scenario (which includes aggressive interventions in each of the four categories listed above), Ethiopia, for example, achieves the 3% target about seven years sooner than in the base case forecast. Restrained by its higher levels of inequality, Kenya also sees huge gains coming quite close to the 3% target, but does not show the same progress as many others. In conclusion, country-level targets that bear in mind specific country conditions are more appropriate than a 'one size fits all' approach.³³

The narrative of continental targets is appealing because it is simple, and

Country-level targets that bear in mind specific conditions are more appropriate than continental targets that imply a 'one size fits all' approach

Burundi, Madagascar, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Rwanda and Tanzania. In terms of absolute numbers living in extreme poverty, Nigeria, the DRC, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda and Malawi all have populations of greater than 10 million living in extreme poverty.

According to the IFs base case forecast, 10 African countries are likely to meet

progress can be measured against the same goals. However, progress is relative, and the same goal might not be appropriate in every context. In this regard, it is encouraging that Agenda 2063 acknowledges the need for flexible targets. The 'The Report of the Commission on the African Union Agenda 2063' states that '[the] targets that have been set have built in flexibilities to address the diversities of Member States in the development trajectory' and

'[b]aseline information should be national not continental'.³⁴

Admittedly, target setting is both a technical and a political exercise. Technical targets consider the baseline and current trajectories (base case) while political or aspirational targets tend to follow a political rationale and reflect a certain political narrative and/or ideology. In this regard, the 2063 Report of the Commission speaks about 'policy determined targets' and acknowledges that some of the targets, especially on integration, food security and 'silencing the guns', conform to policy decisions made by the AU.

The AU's stated goal of ending all wars in Africa by 2020³⁵ ('silencing the guns') clearly falls into the category of an aspirational target. Ending war by 2020 is a laudable goal but in the light of current trends and conflict dynamics on the continent it appears decidedly unachievable.³⁶ It seems reasonable to assume a decreasing conflict burden for Africa over the coming decades,³⁷ but this by no means implies a radical transformation of the continent's reality in the short term, even under a scenario that assumes bold policy changes and a dramatic improvement in the international community's and the AU's crisis response and conflict resolution mechanisms.

above 75 years by 2063 compared to fewer than 60 years today. IFs forecasts suggest that average life expectancy for Africans could indeed reach 75 years by 2063. On a less positive note, however, the double burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases will place African health systems under severe strain. By 2050 and without significant changes in policy or shocks to the system, 60% of deaths in Africa could originate from non-communicable diseases compared to a current rate of less than 35%. In addition, road traffic accidents in Africa are expected to increase rapidly over the next four decades, becoming a major public health challenge across the continent.³⁸

Apart from target setting, integrated policy analysis is about analysing the broader implications of change in one issue area for other areas of human development.

What if, for example, Africa successfully eliminated large-scale inter- and intrastate wars by 2020? IFs forecasts suggest that it may not be the panacea that many expect, as potential human development gains from the eradication of war by 2020 (our own interpretation of silencing the guns) in terms of income, health and education are not spectacular, especially in the short and medium term.

Ending war in Africa by 2020 is a laudable goal, but in the light of current trends it appears decidedly unachievable

75 YEARS

THE AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY THAT AGENDA 2063 ENVISIONS FOR AFRICANS BY 2063

Again, important regional and country differences need to be considered.

A continental target that seems to be within reach considering Africa's current development trajectory relates to life expectancy, although the picture may again vary for different countries and regions. Agenda 2063 envisions Africans enjoying an average life expectancy of

Of course, the benefits would be greatest in the countries and regions that are most affected by violent conflict.³⁹ Under the IFs scenario, improved governance will be a game changer. If, in addition to the absence of war, governance can be improved (that is, if all African countries converged to the average level of the top 10 performing countries in terms

of government effectiveness by 2030), access to electricity could reach 67% – compared to 57% under the expected current trajectory – while ending wars on its own will produce only marginal gains.⁴⁰ This is an important finding because it (once again) alerts decision makers to the fact that negative peace – the absence of war – is a necessary but insufficient condition for development and that Africa needs to take a holistic approach to development.

The African Futures Project also explored the potential and broader impact of a 'Green Revolution' for Africa. As Moyer and Fimhaber explain:

A massive increase in agricultural production is possible across the continent, and with aggressive but reasonable policy interventions Africa could become a net exporter of food in the next 10 years. However, a revolution in agricultural production without developmental policy interventions could lead to large quantities of food leaving the continent, resulting in increased consumption in rich countries while millions of Africans cannot access the calories they need. Promoting human development, therefore, requires coupling a green revolution with programmes to increase low-income consumption and access to food. In addition, production increases cannot be fully absorbed without improvements in water and sanitation, as diarrhoeal diseases significantly diminish health improvements stemming from increases in caloric consumption.⁴¹

In short, it is crucial to analyse how different issue areas are connected and what kinds of interventions hold the greatest potential in terms of human development in Africa. For external partners, integrated policy analysis and forecasting is the answer to the increasingly popular 'value for money'

question. With a tool like IFs it is possible to evaluate which investments generate the greatest returns in the longer term.

Setting purposefully aggressive targets can help raise awareness and create momentum, as the MDG process has powerfully illustrated. However, if targets are to be used effectively for planning, implementation and monitoring purposes they need to be reasonable and achievable.

Availability of and access to reliable data

Integrated policy analysis, including target setting, is not possible without reliable data. Without basic data it will not be possible to understand the continent's current state of development and the specific situation in regions, countries or even subnational entities (i.e. the baselines). However, despite recent gains in the frequency and quality of census

According to recent analysis produced by the Center for Global Development (CGD), data challenges in sub-Saharan Africa are largely systemic and political. The CGD report identifies the following main challenges: national statistical offices lack independence; data is inaccurate; donors dominate priorities; and data is not made publicly available. The report underlines the need for data that is 'intrinsically important to the calculation of almost any major economic or social welfare indicator, such as births and deaths; growth and poverty; tax and trade; sickness, schooling and safety; and land and environment'.⁴² 'Improving the accuracy, timeliness, and availability of these statistics will be critical to the success of the post-2015 development agenda, across every sector.'⁴³

This dovetails with a recent report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) that concludes that, if the much-talked-

Despite important improvements over the last years, data limitations remain significant in Africa

and household surveys in sub-Saharan Africa, data limitations remain significant. In many countries statistical institutions are weak, and the interface between official statistics and the wealth of data at the disposal of the private sector has not been explored fully. Another challenge is how to account for the informal sector, as in many African and other developing countries this sector involves an important part of the labour force, which contributes to economic production. These shortcomings affect the degree of accuracy when estimating current trends and how they are likely to develop in the future. Nevertheless, they should not serve as an excuse not to engage in futures work and, more specifically, quantitative forecasting.

about data revolution is to translate into human development outcomes, it 'requires concrete investments in official statistics, the development of norms and standards to ensure new forms of data collection are managed responsibly, and the disclosure of information that can empower citizens to make their own decisions'.⁴⁴ In this regard, the report identifies five key constraints that need to be overcome: inadequate capacity to produce, use and interpret data; lack of political leadership to invest in and use statistics; failure to make the case; not turning data into information for policymaking and action; and lack of harmonisation of methods and standards.⁴⁵

At the same time, it is necessary to take advantage of technological change and innovation, as it will make information directly available to millions of people and allow for the collection of billions of data points in real time.⁴⁶ This can also enable more effective monitoring and evaluation by communities and inform planning efforts. Using big data can help to compensate for some of the existing information gaps.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that the use of quantitative tools like IFs can serve as a platform to engage stakeholders in a conversation about trends, priorities, expectations and strategies. The same is true for other methods of carrying out futures work. Agenda 2063 stresses the importance of inclusiveness and making people part of the process. Better data and making that data publicly available at no cost and in user-friendly formats is the first step to make this happen. It will strengthen citizen accountability and improve service delivery, the efficient use of resources and ultimately human development outcomes.

Conclusion and recommendations

Over the past five decades Africa has experienced great transition and change. Many positive developments are currently taking shape on the continent. Overall, human development is improving, conflict has declined, and sustained economic growth presents genuine opportunities for development. The prospects for progress in Africa are greater than ever before, yet many structural challenges persist. The pressure to tackle these challenges simultaneously, and to ponder the trade-offs implied in different policy choices, is probably the most complex issue Africa faces today.

Africa must deepen its strategic reflection and its ability to plan for the future if it is to take advantage of existing

opportunities. Long-term planning efforts, such as the AU's Agenda 2063 and others, present a huge opportunity in this regard.

The design of public policies for development needs to be informed by integrated policy analysis. Trade-offs need to be spelled out so that policymakers can make informed decisions and manage citizens' expectations accordingly. Targets need to be aggressive but reasonable. Smart targets have to take specific country conditions and their development trajectories as a starting point.

The negotiation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the framework of the post-2015 development agenda and the subsequent need for data to monitor progress presents an important opportunity to push for better data. Governments and external partners should prioritise investments in data and statistics as a public good.

Thinking systematically about the future is key to shaping a peaceful and prosperous Africa. Futures work in Africa, with the ultimate goal to advance human development on the continent, can be promoted in the following ways:

- Raise awareness about the added value of strategic foresight for development among decision- and policymakers
- Raise awareness about the value of independent and reliable data among political leaders
- Raise the profile of data in decision-making processes
- Encourage adherence to common technical standards and ethics in the collection, ownership and use of data
- Generate evidence of the intrinsic value of official statistics for economic and social development
- Generate evidence of integrated policy analysis and planning via research

- Develop African capacity on futures work in the public sector as well as civil society
- Support the emergence of a community of African futures practitioners
- Support partnerships around data, statistics and futures-oriented research among the public sector, civil society and the private sector

Better data, in particular, means:

- Improved quality and public access in user-friendly formats
- Increased investments in household and establishment surveys, complete civil registration and administrative record systems
- Innovative use of big data to supplement existing information or bridge 'data lagoons', including in partnership with the private sector and citizens
- Improved domestic capacity for data analysis and use as well as commitment to public access, alongside efforts to improve data collection
- Improved methods of data production, documentation and preservation to increase the value of data collection

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- 1 See the AU's website for Agenda 2063: <http://agenda2063.au.int/>
- 2 For instance, the South African Development Community's Vision 2030, Nigeria's Vision 2020, South Africa's National Development Plan 2030, Kenya's Vision 2030, etc.
- 3 See also UN Economic Commission for Africa, The development state: what options for Africa? Prepared for the third meeting of

- the Committee on Governance and Popular Participation, Addis Ababa, 20–21 February 2013.
- 4 See, for example, M Jerven, *Poor numbers: how we are misled by African development statistics and what to do about it*, Cornell Studies in Political Economy, 2013; United Nations (UN), *A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development: the report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 development agenda*, New York: UN, 2013.
 - 5 For a comprehensive overview, see JC Glenn and TJ Gordon (eds), *Futures research methodology version 3.0*, CD-Rom, Washington DC: Millennium Project, 2009.
 - 6 See the website of the African Futures project: www.issafrica.org/futures
 - 7 See the website of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS): <http://www.issafrica.org/>
 - 8 See the website of the Frederick S Pardee Center for International Futures at the University of Denver: <http://pardee.du.edu/>
 - 9 Data and forecasts included in this paper are all from IFs version 7.05.
 - 10 See 'Nigeria almost doubles GDP in recalculation', *Financial Times*, 7 April 2014, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/70b594fe-bd94-11e3-a5ba-00144feabdc0.html> (accessed 20 August 2014).
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 - 25 IFs has been under development for 35 years and constitutes the most sophisticated and comprehensive open source forecasting modelling system publically available. In Africa, IFs forecasts and scenarios have informed the work of Africa's New Partnership for Development, the Western Cape Government and the Gauteng Provincial Government in South Africa, etc.
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About the author

Julia Schünemann is a senior researcher at the Institute for Security Studies, where she leads the African Futures Project. Her research interests relate to statebuilding, peace and conflict studies, human development in Africa and strategic forecasting. She holds a PhD in international relations from Madrid's Complutense University in Spain and an MA in communication, political science and economics from the Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich, Germany.

About the African Futures Project

The African Futures Project is a collaboration between the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver. The African Futures Project uses the International Futures (IFs) model to produce forward-looking, policy-relevant analysis based on exploration of possible trajectories for human development, economic growth and socio-political change in Africa under varying policy environments over the next four decades.

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ISS Pretoria

Block C, Brooklyn Court,
361 Veale Street
New Muckleneuk,
Pretoria, South Africa
Tel: +27 12 346 9500
Fax: +27 12 460 0998
pretoria@issafrica.org

The Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures

Josef Korbel School of International Studies
University of Denver
2201 South Gaylord Street
Denver, CO 80208-0500
Tel: 303-871-4320
pardee.center@du.edu

www.issafrica.org/futures

<http://pardee.du.edu>

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