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# Regional Development in Africa: An Overview

Norbert Edomah

## Abstract

This chapter introduces the various dimensions to regional development in Africa. It starts off by highlighting why regional development matters and the important components of the development process. It further highlights the regional dimension of Africa's development in some important sectors, particularly the role of energy, urbanization, consumption, intra-African migration, and trade in Africa's development process. The adverse effect of conflicts, protests, riots, and demonstrations in Africa's development process resulting from issues of resource constraints and scarcity (of food, fuel, and water) was also addressed. It concludes by pointing out the challenges to development and the need for citizen participation in the development process.

**Keywords:** Africa, development, development policy, intra-regional trade, regional policies

## 1. Introduction: why regional development matters

Regional economic prosperity depends upon realizing the full economic potential of all sub-regions. The territorial approach to the issue of development needs to be a part of the strategic thinking of national and regional bodies. However, how do we make the regions more competitive while at the same time prevent further socio-economic discrepancies in countries and regions? Certainly, place-based development is crucial in accelerating regional growth which focuses on the people, their assets, opportunities and challenges. Indeed, understanding the process of development and how development is to occur is crucial in mapping out strategies to reach and attain set goals.

Arguably, the idea of development applies equally to all nations and regions. Some development indicators such as access to energy, healthcare, education and other social amenities are crucial to accelerate the development process. The Challenge Network argues that there are three dominant high-level elements that play a vital role in development of nations. These are [1]:

1. *Assets and liabilities* possessed by a society
2. *Goals and values* that society sets for itself
3. *Internal rules* by which a society operates.

Assets and liabilities possessed by a society is the first of the elements underpinning the development process. Society's assets such as: natural resources, its people, productive capital, security, etc., has to be properly balanced with its corresponding liabilities such as: resource limits, local and foreign debts, dependent people, etc. The African region is endowed with a lot of natural assets that are yet to be fully harnessed. The natural and human assets of the African region far outweigh its liabilities.

Goals and values that society sets for itself is a crucial element in the development process. Setting clear goals that is well articulated, understood, accepted and actively pursued with clear actions and backed by a general consensus is important. Setting unclear goals makes a society run the risk of either drifting towards the direction where market forces press it to go, or achieving those unclear set goals by accident. Setting unrealistic goals may often lead to a less happy end for that society. This is prevalent within the African region.

The third element underpinning the development of nations is the internal rules by which a society is governed. Development entails learning and managing increasing amounts of complexity that manifests itself in the forms of interconnections, options, information and resources. The internal rules of nations and regions guide its socio-economic and political growth. Indeed, societies which organize themselves for political and socio-economic growth develops, and those who are unable to do this do not.

With respect to the speed of development, institutions play a vital role implicitly through parliaments and embodied laws or explicitly through rules of everyday conduct and social engagement. Indeed, the sum of these structures is what is referred to as the 'social capital' of a society. It is difficult to change tacit institutions in predictable ways. However, policy instruments can be used to alter formal institutions to achieve development outcomes.

Regional development policies should be mainly about integration of several sectoral policies that are often designed in a way that is not coherent. It is also about tailoring policies to the specific needs of different places. Indeed, focusing on increasing productivity will yield increased competitiveness which leads to growth that improves quality of life. The following sections now delve into some African sectoral dynamics and their role in accelerating regional development in Africa.

## **2. Energy and development in Africa**

Access to modern energy is vital to ending poverty. Africa is at the epicenter of global energy poverty, specifically sub-Saharan Africa. The International Energy Agency (IEA) argues that about 650 million Africans do not have access to electricity, which amounts to about two-thirds of the continent population [2]. Over 750 million people in Africa still do not have access to clean cooking fuels, leading to a huge number of premature deaths each year resulting from emissions [3]. The energy sector in sub-Saharan Africa is not yet able to meet the needs and aspirations of its citizens [4].

The primary purpose of our energy systems is to enable economic growth and to improve better quality of life [5]. Energy poverty is one of Africa's obstacles to progress, growth and economic development [6]. However, to accelerate regional development, three major factors are revolutionizing Africa's electricity sector; increased consumer demand for energy, technological innovation and new business models to improve energy access. Consumers are demanding renewables and other alternative forms of energy to cater for their basic energy needs. New technologies, such as solar photovoltaic (solar PV) technologies, are changing ways of generating

power in Africa, and new business models are attracting and bringing public, private and donor investments into the energy sector.

In general, African countries are endowed with abundant renewable energy resources that can be increasingly harnessed [7]. The IEA argues that by 2040, renewables are expected to account for nearly 45% of all power generation capacity in the region, varying in scale from large to small hydropower dams, to mini and off-grid solutions in more remote areas [2].

Increasing access to electricity can turbocharge economic growth in the region, enabling a major push towards a more self-sustaining model of economic growth [8]. Indeed, this requires high-level political commitment to energy sector reforms with emphasis on building human capacity within the energy sector and strengthening policy/regulatory frameworks that leads to the emergence of more functioning energy markets.

### **3. Urbanization and development in Africa**

Urbanization, beyond the cities and infrastructure, is more about the people. The United Nations argues that more than half of the global population now lives in urban areas, with a projected increase of 75% by 2050 [9]. Urban population in Africa hovers close to 500 million people and it is expected to double by 2040 [10]. Urbanization is vital to fighting poverty in the developing world. Africa has the opportunity to get urbanization right and to avoid mistakes made by other regions through effecting the right urbanization policies and growth strategies.

A challenge we find in Africa is that cities are developing while manufacturing is declining which poses a challenge on job availability. Another challenge we find in Africa is that cities are growing but population are sprawling, with population spread over kilometers which makes concentration, an important value of cities, not so effective. We have the opportunity in Africa to ensure that growth of cities is compact and efficient.

A lack of infrastructure density is another important factor affecting urbanization in Africa. There are lots of opportunities for future infrastructure investments that would make cities work more effectively in small, medium-sized and large (mega) cities. Indeed, every dollar of investment counts so as to ensure that cities are more efficient, that they grow in a more compact manner.

With respect to pattern of urbanization and city development, it is observed that in most African cities, commercial and industrial land are not necessarily concentrated in city centers or in certain parts of the cities. The jobs are very dispersed around the cities. This presents an opportunity for cities to become more efficient with respect to the urban pattern of the cities. With respect to share of commercial land, most African cities have a much lower percentage of commercial and industrial lands, with most having less than 7% of commercial and industrial land compared to other regions of the world [10]. Indeed, urbanization for most African cities would mean; developing cities with jobs, good housing policies and good transportation linkages that connect the housing and the jobs so that people are able to reach a large number of available jobs within a reasonable time.

### **4. Food production, consumption, and resource constraints in Africa**

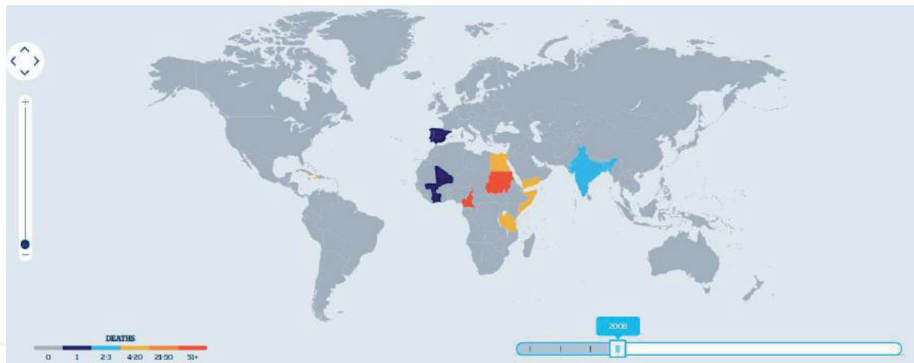
Food security in Africa is a vital part of development that needs to be addressed using a short, medium and long term approach. Sustainable agriculture and food security needs to be an important part of the policy dialog to secure a sustainable

growth path for Africa. Rising population and a rich diet that takes a lot more resources to produce than they used to are driving increased demand for food. Increasing food production is becoming increasingly difficult because rising food demand is happening simultaneously with increased energy bills. Rising food demand coupled with climate change issues are making food difficult to produce.

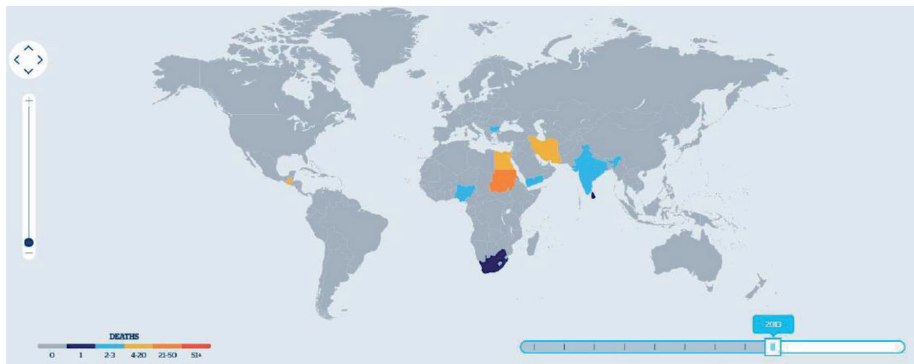
Science and technology can play a vital role in food production, particularly the development of technologies that will help farmers reach their full potential with respect to the amount of food they produce. Having improved quality seeds, fertilizers and better equipment designed for the African climate, soil, cultures and communities can help improve food production. Indeed, the need to develop locally appropriate solutions to local challenges is important to improving food production.

Food distribution is another challenge plaguing Africa. A large proportion of food produced either end up in the bins of are used as animal feeds. In Africa, we need not only to improve our food production but we need to stop wasting food. Globally, 25–35% of our food gets wasted in different ways. Food wastage is indeed an issue impacting on food scarcity which worsens the poverty challenge that leads to possible conflicts.

**Figure 1** is a global chaos map which shows the number of deaths linked to food, fuel and water crises in 2008. The African continent was the most affected in that year. In Mali and Cote d'Ivoire, one death each was recorded as a result of unrest linked to water, fuel and food. In the same year, 60 and 51 deaths were recorded in Cameroon and Sudan as a result of riots and conflict linked to resource constraints. Egypt, Somalia and Tanzania also recorded 15, 5 and 8 deaths owing to riots, protests and conflicts linked to resource constraints (around food, fuel and water) in 2008.



**Figure 1.**  
*Global Chaos Map showing number of deaths linked to resource constraints arising from food, fuel and water crises in 2008.*



**Figure 2.**  
*Global Chaos Map showing number of deaths linked to resource constraints arising from food, fuel and water crises in 2013.*



As with 2008 where most resource crises were experienced on the African continent, the case was no different in 2013 as shown in **Figure 2**. In 2013, Nigeria and South Africa recorded 2 and 1 death respectively linked to looting and protests. In Sudan, 30 related deaths resulting from demonstrations and protests were recorded that were linked to resource constraints. Egypt in the same year recorded 7 deaths owing to demonstrations linked to resource constraints related to food, fuel and water.

## **5. Intra-African migration, trade, and economic development**

The United Nations argues that intra-African migration has grown in recent years, from 15 million in 2000 to 25 million in 2017 [11]. Migration generates significant economic benefits for countries. Specific sector demands in destination countries create economic opportunities for men and women. Intra-African migration stimulates productivity in agriculture, construction, information technology and services sectors. This has contributed to destination countries' GDP, particularly countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and South Africa.

Countries of origin benefit from increased intra-African trade. Migrants demand food products from their home countries, stimulating food export. Migrants' remittances and other contributions from Africa's diaspora also boost economic development in countries of origin. In 2016, total remittances accounted for 51% of private capital flow to Africa [11]. Indeed, women contribute as much as men with respect to remittances.

Ethiopian international migrants' remittances are largely used for productive investments rather than consumption. About 40% of remittances are used for productive enterprise while about 33% are used for everyday consumption [11]. If better managed, intra-African migration could yield further benefits for migrants and countries since there is a huge potential contribution of migration to GDP per capita in Africa.

To better harness the opportunities that migration provides within the African continent, it is important for African governments to align migration, trade and investment policies to development objectives. It is also crucial to leverage remittances and harness diaspora for productive investments in countries of origin. It is also important to adopt flexible labor policies to ease migrants' mobility and integrate migrants to the labor markets while also allocating resources to address structural determinants of Africa's socio-economic development.

## **6. Concluding thoughts**

Development is often linked with economic prosperity. However, development is a much broader concept incorporating many aspects such as economics, resource distribution, culture, health, politics and questions of poverty, inequality and the way in which the world is structured. Prosperity is important but the question of who gets the prosperity and who has the potential for it is also vital.

A salient issue with regards development is the gender dimension. Historically, women have not participated in the process, design and management of development in many regions. Women have not been involved, or rather permitted to participate, in designing policies for increasing literacy, economic resources and providing social services. The cost of major shifts in development policies have been borne by women, with women constituting a vast majority of the poor.

Some important aspects to living better lives are better health policies, education and food which simply highlight the need for better incomes. Many global issues impede development. Weak and corrupt governments that are incapable of delivering the kind of services needed for development constitute a major challenge. Many countries have suffered, or are suffering, from internal wars and conflicts which constitute immense problems for development because people's livelihoods are interrupted and government cannot provide essential services to aid development. Indeed, development can go badly if it is done the corrupt way and some development have very bad environmental consequences.

The most pressing development concerns are situations where decisions are made by small elite, fostering development that is not democratic. This yields a development that is *for the people*, but not *by the people*. This calls for a need for citizen participation in the development process.

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