

Forward planning or wishful thinking?

# Looking at Agenda 2063

How does a continent plan for its future? When the African Union convened for its 24th Ordinary Assembly in 2015, they created a blueprint. Agenda 2063 is both a plan for development and a snapshot of how Africa should be by 2063. But is it realistic, and most importantly, will it work?

By Mako Muzenda

To understand Agenda 2063, it's important to understand the history of the African Union (AU). Its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), was created to fight for political and economic independence and end colonial administrations across Africa (Nkrumah 1963). The end of the millennium, however, signalled a global shift. The Cold War was over, the end of apartheid in South Africa meant the end of colonial administrations, civil wars in several countries had shaken the continent's stability, and the rise of neoliberal economics shifted already unequal power balances. With independence achieved, the ties that bound the OAU together frayed. The AU formally came into being in 2002 to address the new challenges – faced with “the unenviable task of mopping up after nearly four decades of misguided political and economic policies” (Makinda/Okumu 2008, 30).

Agenda 2063 is an integral part of this mopping up. Imagining *The Africa We Want*, its aspirations, goals and projects aim at transforming Africa by 2063 (Ndizera/Muzee 2018). The idea emerged in 2013 with the 50th anniversary of the OAU and has largely been crafted and implemented by the AU's 55 member states working collectively. Some of the projects are already underway. The African Continental Free Trade Area has been operational since January 2021. The Pan-African University launched the Pan African Virtual and E-University, and the AU passport was officially launched in 2016.

## An ambitious plan

Agenda 2063 is an ambitious plan. Its weaknesses, however, mirror the failures of the AU, the first hurdle being implementation (Muzenda 2017). While some areas and regions are on track to reach their targets, performance in other areas and regions has been poor. East Africa achieved 40 % of 2019's targets, with Southern Africa and Central Africa only scoring 25 %. It's

a problem that can affect any organisation, especially one that represents the interests of such a diverse continent. However, the AU is in danger of repeating the lofty ideas and inaction that plagued the OAU (Tieku 2019). Even with early successes, 18 countries haven't ratified the instrument so far (Mkhabela 2020). *Silence the Guns*, the AU's initiative to end conflict, gender violence and human rights violations, missed its 2020 deadline (Karssen 2020). Financing projects such as a high-speed train network to connect Africa's capital cities is a major issue, considering that the AU is increasingly reliant on external donors (Tieku 2019). Yet the biggest challenge is the perception of the AU as an organisation that benefits the political elite. The first recipients of the AU passport have been heads of state and diplomats, with no clear indication as to when private citizens can apply. Agenda 2063 is a plan created in the higher echelons of power – the millions of Africans outside those circles barely had a say.

Agenda 2063 shows that the AU recognises the need for clear objectives that can translate into projects and actions. However, such an ambitious initiative requires an organisation that is financially independent, non-elitist and can implement projects on time. With 42 years left until its deadline, it's too early to write off Agenda 2063. But to avoid yet another incident of high hopes and empty promises, the AU needs to show it can deliver.

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