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Africa and Foresight: Better Futures in Development



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Foreword

In the 21st century, new opportunities for growth and development will be abundantly available in Africa. The continent is already showing the world the way forward in areas like mobile money applications. It is easier to pay a cab in Nairobi than it is in New York. Kiosk owners in Zambia, not banks or phone companies, are pioneering new and safe ways of transferring money across the continent, into the furthest reaches of the country side. The success of M-Pesa, and the widespread availability of mobile platform, is spawning a host of start-ups in Kenya. M-Pesa itself has expanded into Afghanistan, South Africa, India, Romania and Albania.

Many, if not most of these future opportunities were not available in the 20th century. Rapid urbanization, smart applications of technological innovation, increased participation in the global flow of people, trade and money, not to mention the continuous fall-out of climate change, is shaping completely new development realities for an Emergent Africa.

In the 21st century, development templates from the 19th and 20th century are rapidly losing their relevance. These 'used futures' speak to a world that no longer exist. To realize the twin visions of Africa 2063 and the 2030 Agenda, and to sustain the momentum of emerging Africa, we need to look to the future.

I am pleased, therefore, to present this paper on the use of strategic foresight for better futures in Africa. The paper does not provide specific answers to how the future will look like.

Instead, our paper emphasises the importance of the exploration of possible futures (plural) for Africa. Government, the private sector and civil society should, jointly or separately, use foresight methodologies (see our Manual) in order to identify the range of opportunities (and risks) for development in an emerging Africa during the 21st century.

Max Everest-Phillips
Director, UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence

ABSTRACT

Agenda 2063, SDGs and Emerging Africa, with its promises of economic growth, social equality and a healthy environment for current and future generations, must be realized in the context of an increasingly interdependent and complex world in a semi-permanent state of disruption. There is little, if anything, in the past that prepares individuals, communities, businesses, cities and governments for the kind of far-reaching, rapid and simultaneous change of the 21st century. Change, complexity and global interdependence are creating new realities, with new and unique opportunities and challenges for development that are profoundly different from those of the 20th century.

It is in this context that Strategic Foresight is rapidly emerging as an essential additional tool to conventional strategic thinking. Strategic Foresight enables public planners to use new ways of thinking about, talking about, and implementing strategic plans that are compatible with the unfolding future. Strategic Foresight is the umbrella term for those innovative strategic planning, policy formulation and solution design methods that do not predict or forecast the future, but allow planners to work with alternative futures. By doing so, Strategic Foresight helps leaders make better decisions – decisions which, in turn, help them regain the initiative and manage the future.

‘Strategic Foresight’ or ‘Foresight’ (used synonymously in this paper) has been defined as *‘the capacity to think systematically about the future to inform decision making today. It is a cognitive capacity that we need to develop as individuals, as organisations and as a society. In individuals, it is usually an unconscious capacity and needs to be surfaced to be used in any meaningful way to inform decision-making’*¹¹. The emergence of modern ‘state’ Foresight in the 1950s reflected the growing realisation by governments that technological,

social and (geo-)political change was generating a future that was fundamentally different from the past. In the 21st century, government Foresight has vastly expanded its footprint in at least three areas: in ‘adaptive’ and ‘anticipatory’ government, in social innovation, and in the call for intergenerational justice.



© NASA: Africa satellite picture

‘Fully-fledged Foresight’ (as distinctive from strategic planning, forecasting, risk management, and more limited forms of Foresight, etc.) is **prospective**, **policy-related** and **participative**. Foresight is decidedly future-oriented. It is concerned with gathering genuine information, knowledge and information about future realities, as opposed to projecting ‘old’ data, assumptions and ‘hindsight’ from the past into the future. Government Foresight is integrated in existing policy making processes, structures and timetables, as opposed to be supplied by external parties with their own concerns and deadlines. Foresight depends on the participation of a broad range of **cognitive perspectives** and the effective use of **collective intelligence** to generate insight in the future, as

¹ Conway, M (2015) ‘Foresight: an introduction’, Thinking Futures: <http://thinkingfutures.net/wp-content/uploads/TFRGuideForesight1.pdf>, p2.

opposed to exclusive technocratic or academic points of view.

There are four major areas where Foresight can make an important contribution to the realization of Agenda 2063, 2030 Agenda and Emergent Africa:

- 1. National Development Visions**
- 2. Anticipatory Governance and Strategic Management**
- 3. Resilient Policy Planning**
- 4. Policy and Public Services Innovation**

As one of the leading development organisations in this field, UNDP through GCPSE has developed Foresight applications and methods that are exclusively tailored to the issues, constraints and capacity of developing countries and which are truly Foresight-informed, policy-related and participatory. It has built extensive ties with local Foresight ecosystems. At the end of 2016, GCPSE established the Empowered Futures Initiative (EFI), which will function as a platform for applied Foresight for developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

2015 was a memorable year for Africa. In January 2015, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union adopted Agenda 2063, a visionary development framework that seeks to expedite the transformation of the continent. *Agenda 2063* proudly proclaims ‘the Africa Africans Want’, a set of aspirations for Africa that reflect a “*desire for shared prosperity and well-being, for unity and integration, for a continent of free citizens and expanded horizons, where the full potential of women and youth, boys and girls are realized, and with freedom from fear, disease and want.*”²

In September of the same year, world leaders, including those of the African Union, gathered in New York for the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit. They solemnly signed the final outcome document *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, and committed to its core Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs encapsulate ‘The World We Want’, the global vision on how the world should look like in 2030, in which the spoils of human progress and economic growth will be shared fairly by all, poverty will be eradicated and the planet protected “*from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change*”³



© BY-NC-ND United Nations Development Programme: Implementing Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in Africa

In 1992, UNDP set up the African Futures project to support African countries to undertake forward-looking studies and develop a long-term vision of their development. Between 1992 and 1995, African Futures provided technical support to the planning and implementation of 25 national studies that reflected on visions and alternative strategies for the future; one example of such a process is Burundi Vision 2025. Publications of the African Futures project include a set of four scenarios for Africa in the year 2025. In early 2004, UNDP established the African Futures Institute (AFI) in order to harness the gains made under the African Futures project, and to sustain futures analysis in the region. Registered in South Africa, the AFI positions itself as a pan-African organisation, with a vision to facilitate Africa’s formulation of its own path to development, developing its own methods and approaches. *

* Bingley, Kate, *Foresight in International Development*, in: *IDS Bulletin Transforming Development Knowledge*, Volume 47, Number 4, 2016, p.10

In the shadow of these two momentous occasions, a third event with a potentially high impact on the future of Africa took place in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. In March 2015, the first International Conference on the Emergence of Africa was opened by President of Cote d’Ivoire, H.E. Alassane Ouattara. The Conference Introductory Notes reveal the changing narrative on African development: “*There is a sharp contrast between the current economic dynamic in Africa and that of the 1980s characterized by a stagnant growth and an over-indebtedness. The optimism blowing through Africa today has led many African countries to develop emergence plans through different processes and long-term*

2 <http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf>

3 Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, A/Res/70/1



CC BY-NC-ND United Nations Photo: Aerial view of Monrovia, the capital of Liberia

planning activities.”⁴ In 2014 the book *Africa 2050: Realizing the Continent’s Full Potential* (an outcome of a study commissioned by the 5th Joint Annual Meeting of the African Union and UN Economic Commission for Africa Conference of Ministers) was launched in Kigali. The remarkable report *Africa in 50 Years’ Time: The Road to Inclusive Growth*⁵, published by the African Development Bank (AfDB) in 2011, is an outstanding example of the use of Foresight in identifying strategic opportunities for transformation in a more empowered development narrative.

All three seminal 2015 events are concerned with visions of the future of Africa. More specifically, they envision a future that contains many opportunities for transformative development in Africa. Words such as ‘transformation’, ‘transformational’ and ‘transformative’ are omnipresent in texts, declaration and speeches on the 2030 Agenda, conveying some of the optimism and urgency surrounding the SDGs formulation process. Immediately after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the Secretary General of the United Nation, told the press: “*These Goals are a blueprint for a better future. Now we must use the goals to transform the world.*”⁶ The fact remains, however, that the world is already transforming at neck breaking speed, regardless of the grand visions of Agenda 2063, 2030 Agenda and Emerging Africa.

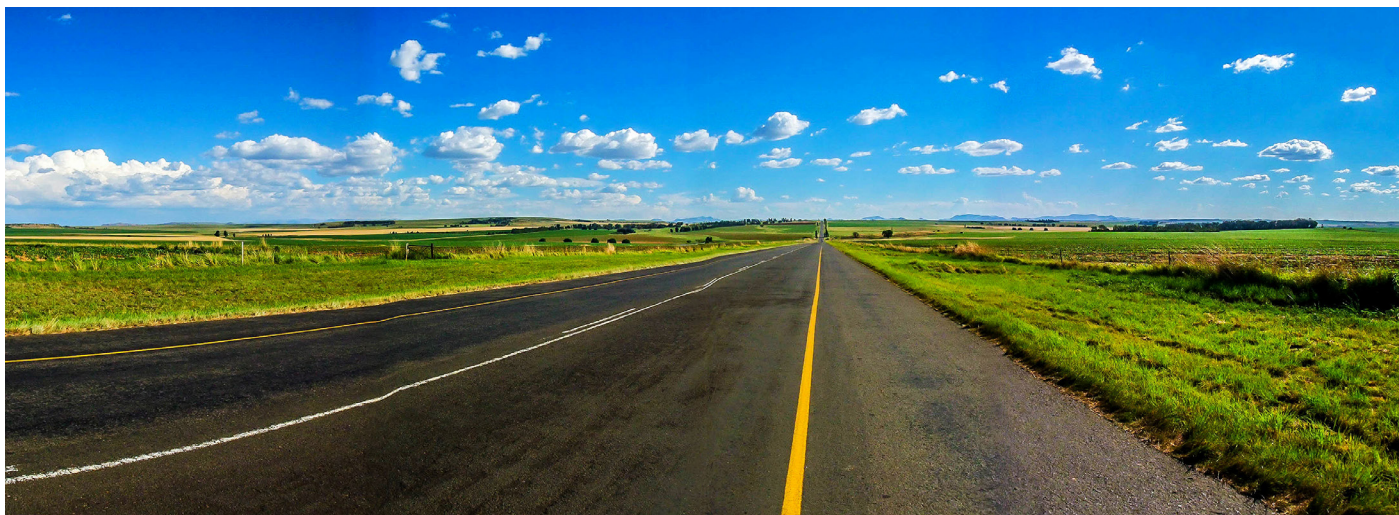
The great disruptive forces of the 21st century, like climate change, technological innovation, ever increasing flows and networks of trade, finance and people, etc., are creating radically new future realities. How do the ‘visions of transformation’ in Africa relate to this global ‘reality of transformation’? Are our concepts and idioms of the future sufficient to capture the radical nature of change and identify emerging strategic opportunities and challenges to realize the development visions? How do we implement our development plans in a volatile and complex environment, when the past provides increasingly less guidance for what might happen in the future? Does the ‘World We Want’ and the ‘Africa Africans Want’ speak to future realities (in 2030 and 2063 respectively) or more to a world or Africa we would have liked to see in 2015? In other words, how *future-proof* and *future-ready* are our vision of the future really?

This paper will explore how ‘Foresight’ can equip African governments with future-oriented tools to transform ‘The World We Will Get’ into ‘The World We Want’. It sets the scene by emphasizing that ‘The World We Get’ will be significantly different from ‘The World We Have’: an incredible amount of disruptive change, either highly visible, simmering under the surface or still hidden from view, in virtually every domain (social, economic, political, environmental, technological, agricultural, cultural, etc.), is interacting to create radically new (and unknown) development realities, making development templates and paradigms from previous areas significantly less relevant. Subsequently, the technique of ‘Foresight’ is introduced and discussed, not only as a tool to make sense of African development in a rapidly changing world, but also as a tool to rethink ‘development’ in Africa and to pro-actively shape a transformative development narrative uniquely suited to African development in the 21st century.

4 http://www.africa-emergence.com/fichier/doc/Conference_introductory_notes.pdf

5 <http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Africa%20in%2050%20Years%20Time.pdf>

6 <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51968#.WFEfVXed5bU>



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CHANGE IN THE 21st CENTURY: The Disruptive Context

Agenda 2063, SDGs and Emerging Africa, with its promises of economic growth, social equality and a healthy environment for current and future generations, must be realized in the context of an increasingly interdependent and complex world in a semi-permanent state of disruption. There is little, if anything, in the past that prepares individuals, communities, businesses, cities and governments for the kind of far-reaching, rapid and simultaneous change of the 21st century. Change, complexity and global interdependence are creating new realities, with new and unique opportunities and challenges for development that are profoundly different from those of the 20th century (or any other modernization template currently available).

A recent report by McKinsey Global Institute

are producing change so significant that much of the management intuition that has served us in the past will become irrelevant. This is no ordinary disruption.”⁷

The ‘great disruptive forces’ of the 21st century are not necessarily new: climate change, technological innovation, urbanization, globalisation (i.e. the global flow and networks of trade, finance and people) etc., have a familiar ring to them. What is new in the 21st century, however, is their accelerating pace, their interaction and mutual impact, and the radically new realities they generate. Sometimes these ‘realities’ are negative: the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, ‘9/11’, the Great Financial Crisis/Recession, the Eurozone Refugee Crisis, various local and global pandemics are recent examples of an increasing number of slow onset shocks, crisis suddenly appearing out of nowhere, perfect storms, ‘Black Swans’, etc.⁸ But that is only

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